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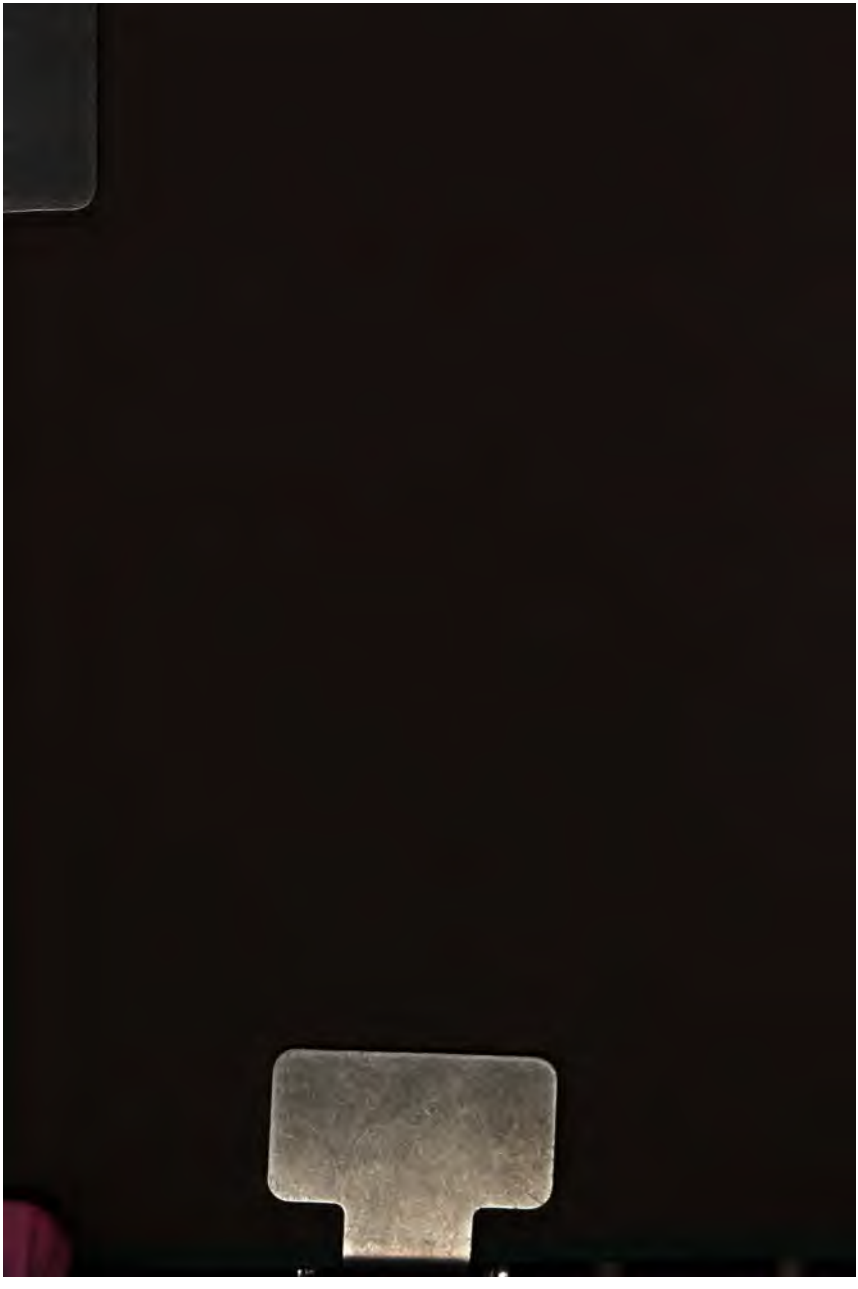
CHRIST
AND
CHRISTIAN MORALS

JOHN CHRISTIEN, D.D.



CHRIST

AND

CHRISTIAN MORALS.

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CHRIST

AND

CHRISTIAN MORALS.

A Fragment.

BY

JOHN CHRISTIEN, D.D.,

ST ANDREW'S, NORTH SHIELDS.

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1871.

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"Christianity is not a religion for the religious, but a religion for man. I do not accept it because my temperament so disposes me, and because it meets my individual mood of mind, or my tastes. I accept it as it is suited to that moral condition in respect of which there is no difference of importance between me and the man I may next encounter in my path."

—*The Restoration of Belief.*

PREFACE.

This little book is set afloat on the stream that carries out to a dark and devouring sea so many similar books, neither from a false estimate of its real worth, nor to challenge the criticism of the learned; but in deference to the desire of many kind friends who have expressed their appreciation of the pulpit labours of the Author, and in hope that the printed page may prove a vindication from the miserable and mischievous cry, "Not the Gospel."

Preparations for the ordinary Sunday ministrations, of necessity are more or less fragmentary and tautologic. The changeable congregation of a seaport town specially demands that in a series, however brief, the several discourses should hold but loosely together. Simple, as molten and clarified by the fire of thought,—practical, as the outcome of deep spiritual consciousness,—and sugges-

tive, rather than elaborate, as having more power to quicken personal reflection and life,—these have appeared to be the most desirable qualities after which to endeavour. Further, print cannot preach. These apologetic remarks are respectfully offered to the stranger.

To those who have heard, with kindly attention and affectionate sympathy, these Discourses on the Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ, and several other similar series, the Preacher tenders, with the New Year, a renewal of self-devotion to their highest and holiest interests.

JANUARY 1871.

"The beautiful rays coming from the face of God, and shining in such loveliness around us, are reflected and refracted when they come in contact with the human heart. Each heart is apt to receive only such as please it, and to reject the others. Hence the many-coloured aspects in which God is presented to different nations and individuals. Hence the room for each man fashioning a God after his own heart."—Dr M'Cosh.

"Our blessedness is, that Christ does not declare to us a system, and say, 'This is the Truth;' but He points to a Person, even to Himself, and says, 'I am the Truth;' and thus He founded, not a school, but a Church—a fellowship which stands in its faith upon a Person, not in its tenure of a doctrine, or at least only mediately and in a secondary sense upon this."—Archbishop Trench.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

I.—TRANSFIGURATION, ... 1

Hermon, not Tabor, the Mount—Why Jesus Christ sought its solitude—What makes places "holy."

1. *Jesus transfigured in personal appearance.*—The soul transfigures the body—Transfiguring power in communion with God.

2. *The transfigured Christ transformed the Disciples.*—What He was to them *before;* what *now*—How by faith in Him they were morally transfigured—Faith in the mountain glory of Christ still the transforming power among men.

Note: — MORALITY AND FAITH IN CHRIST, ... 16

II.—THE HEAVENLY VISITORS, . . . 17

The scene on Hermon a fact worthy of credit

PAGE

—The question of miracles—The sublime picture and its interpretation.

1. *Conscious existence of departed men.*—Two *men*—Immortality—A *new* body after the death of this a possible thing.

2. *Self-sacrifice the principle of true life.*—The mind of Christ at this moment—Why *Moses* visited Him—Meaning of the Law—Why *Elias* was sent to Christ—Interpreting principle of Providence—What they spoke concerning His "decease"—He is comforted, strengthened.

3. *A lesson for the Disciples and us.*

III.—THE DEPARTURE OF THE VISION, . . 36

Dreaming—The good of dreams—Why Peter would have the heavenly visitors tarry—His error.

1. *Seclusion from the world not pure religion.*—Monasticism a false idea—The strength and beauty of moral life which God desiderates not to be obtained by seclusion or isolation.

2. *Usefulness to form character the true measure of the value of things.*—Moral character a man's most real property—True meaning of Great, Small, Trifling—The vision only a means of grace—Character an eternal influence.

3. *The departure of a vision the coming of*

PAGE

the strengthener. — How — Same principle obtains in the material and mental worlds— Also in the spiritual or moral world—God, "mighty to save," comes in the dark.

IV.—JESUS CHRIST THE SON OF GOD, . . 51

Sublime conception of God—Can the saying of the Voice be substantiated?—Christ's own challenge—The argument stated.

1. *Jesus the Son of God by His miraculous birth.*—A mysterious duality marks the Christ of *history*—Similar duality marks the Christ of *prophecy*—Reasoning from the birth to the life, or from the life to the birth, the miraculous conception is supported—It remains with the unbeliever to account for the existence of such a character as that of Jesus Christ.

2. *Jesus the Son of God by the Holy Spirit which animated Him.*—His bearing emphatically His own—Peculiarity of His piety—Originality of His teaching—Contrasted with Shakespeare—The sum of this argument.

3. *Why was Jesus manifested?*—What He is.

V.—THE FATHER'S "WELL-DONE," . . 68

Journey up Hermon—The second summit—Selected spot of transfiguration scene.

Why God well-pleased with Jesus.—He had a human and progressive life—Interpretation of

PAGE

His baptism—Self-devotion to life;—of His transfiguration — Self-devotion to death—Personal trueness to the mind of God the spring of His actions.

1. *True notion of acceptable sacrifice.*—Surrender of will.

2. *Filial obedience the proper bearing towards God.*—Men-children.

3. *Suffering makes things musical.*—The Christ made by suffering—Divine music on earth.

Note:—THE WORD "REGENERATION,". 83

VI.—THE SAYINGS OF JESUS, . . . 85

Talking—Jesus talked—How, and with what results.

1. What involved in hearing Jesus RATHER THAN THE SECTS AND PARTIES OF THE JEWS—(*a*) The *Pharisees*—their doctrine of oral tradition — their ritualism — their rejection of universal principles — (*b*) The *Sadducees*—their denial of any resurrection —their worldliness—(*c*) The *Essenes*—their isolation from the world—their asceticism.

2. What involved in receiving the sayings of Jesus RATHER THAN THE PHILOSOPHIES OF THE GENTILES — (*a*) *Stoicism* — (*b*) *Platonism*—The conversational talk of Jesus put in contrast—His doctrines commend themselves to men.

PAGE

3. What involved in hearing Jesus ON THE DOCTRINE OF SACRIFICE—The doctrine as common both to Jews and Gentiles—(*a*) There is something greater than Law; *Mercy*—Law and Mercy not opposite principles—(*b*) Something greater than Justice; *Forgiveness*—Love is God's OUGHT — Justice and Forgiveness modes of God's Love—Who is the only true God—What is Jesus Christ—What is to be preached.

VII.—THE FATHER'S GLORY IN CHRIST, . . 104

Moral unity of Jesus Christ and God—What God makes to be His glory in Christ.

1. *In relation to Original Sin.*—Children not exposed to wrath—Original Sin and Original Guilt two things—Why perpetuation of a sinful nature is ordained—Christ's way of purifying the heart from the original taint, and regenerating the nature—How we to bear ourselves to children.

2. *In relation to Actual Sin.*—First, Indignation — Then forgiving mercy — Ultimately, to the impenitent "outer darkness."

Note:—ETERNAL PUNISHMENT, . . 117

VIII.—JESUS THE MEDIATOR, ... 122

Jesus only.

1. *God is One.*—A person—Yet the doctrine of a Trinity a truth—The word "Person."

PAGE

2. *What the bearing of God towards men.*—In nature contradictory—In Scripture contradictory—In Jesus the contradictions harmonised.

3. *Jesus Christ the Mediator.*—Mediation a law of the universe—Why the Mediator a *man* — How Jesus is the *Christ* — His mediatorial work threefold; Sin, Judgment, Grace—Philosophy of reconciliation.

4. *What do with Him who is called Christ.*—What He was—The dualism of Christ no mere figment of theology — Our bearing towards Him should be *Faith and Worship.*

Note:—THE WORD "PERSON" IN RELATION TO THE TRINITY, . . . 137

IX.—CHRIST AND CHRISTIANITY, . . . 141

Jesus the central point in the history of morals —Has re-made the world—An argument for His divinity.

1. *Eternal sameness of God.*—Why use the word "sameness"—Jesus was a development —Yet God and Jesus one—Science not demonstrate an incarnation to be impossible —Only a *person* can reveal the Moral Being of God—How God in Christ is ever the same.

2. *Eternal abiding of God among men.*—Meaning of Christ's departure—How for

PAGE

ever among men—The living person solves many perplexities.

3. *Progress of Christianity.*—What is the "Kingdom of Christ and of God"—Why the "Church" instituted — Testimony of history in relation to the kingdom—Limitations and errors—Call to the Church—More confidence in the Kingdom—More appropriating faith in Jesus Christ.

No doubt of ultimate triumph — Jesus Christ proves Himself the same "to-day" that He was "yesterday"—Our call to live "Christ."

I.

TRANSFIGURATION.

"Jesus taketh Peter and James and John, and leadeth them up into a high mountain apart by themselves, and He was transfigured before them."—MARK ix. 2.

1. INTO what mountain? Why this transfiguration? Is it fact or fiction? Why take three disciples—*these* three too—and be transfigured before them? What the moral meaning which most nearly concerns ourselves? These and other questions will find answer in the discourses we have prepared on this wonderful incident in the life of Jesus Christ.

2. From about the fourth century Tabor has been associated with the scene of the Transfiguration. In the monastic ages it was one of the holy shrines pilgrims were wont to visit, and its sides and summit were crowded with hermits. But it is susceptible of proof from the Old Testament, and from later history, that at least a fortress, if not a town, existed on Tabor from very early times to about B.C. 50: and Josephus

says that he strengthened the fortifications of the town there about A.D. 60: also the narrative says Jesus conducted His disciples aloft, up a—*the*—high mountain where they were alone by themselves. These are distinct negative reasons against the tradition which connects Tabor with the Transfiguration, while there are positive ones in favour of Hermon. The evangelists record the event in connection with a journey to Cæsarea Philippi. Jesus would seem therefore to have been in the hill-region at the foot of Anti-Libanus: and Luke distinctly says, "into *the* high hill," where the definite article limits the sense to some mountain which, in respect to Cæsarea, might be called *the* mountain. We then conclude that some part of the ridge of Hermon was the favoured spot whither Jesus would lead His disciples "apart to pray."

3. Magnificent are the peaks of Hermon. They form almost the only mountain that deserves the name in Palestine. The whole side is composed of limestone; is very steep and savage, with tufts of grass and thorny shrubs at intervals. Trees are few; living creatures fewer;—human dwellers none. There are three summits. Mounting to the second, a glorious panorama opens. On the north, stretch far away the Lebanon mountains. Stretching to the eastern horizon is the plain of Arabia, with the queen-city of

Damascus. Away southwards are Cæsarea and a hundred villages; the lake of Gennesaret too is visible, lying in its deep bed, and the chasm of the Jordan running between the heights of Gilead and Samaria. Carmel, too, is seen, extending far out into the "great and wide sea;" and the eye sweeps along the coast and cliffs till it rests on the promontory of Tyre.

4. Up to this summit of Hermon Jesus, with Peter, James, and John, now climbed; reaching it when the sun was beginning to sink to his rest in the far western sea. It was a turning-point—a crisis—in the history of the "Son of Man." Many of His disciples were gone back and walked no more with Him. Even the twelve seemed likely to "go away." He could no more "walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him." He had saddened the hearts of the nearest and dearest to Him by emphatic intimations of His approaching sufferings. He had caused their fond hopes of worldly dignity and success to fall from their minds like shot stars from a benighted firmament. They understood Him not. He came proclaiming, "I am He that should come: the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." He came saying, "I am the way: I am the means." But they neither understood the

spirituality of His mission, nor the means of its accomplishment. His only means was that which light has,—shining. "I am the *light of* the world." If He spoke, it was to unfold Him who is the "Spirit:" if He was prodigal of benefits, it was to teach men the "Goodness of God:" if He suffered, it was to show the meekness of Him who is the "God of Patience:" if He should give His life, it was to demonstrate that "God is love:" and if He should take it again, it was to manifest Him who is the "True God." Understanding not, many therefore "walked no more with Him;" and the leaders of Jewish thought sought to take His life, classing Him with Judas the Gaulonite, Barchochebas, and Dositheus. So He left his familiar haunts by the lake, to return to them, as far as we know, only once more; and made for the "holy mount." It was probably the grand rock by Cæsarea, which He and the disciples passed in their way, and on which then stood the newly-built and beautiful marble temple of Augustus, which suggested the play on Peter's name, when Jesus blessed him for a confession, that has been written round the grand dome of St Peter's at Rome, but far more indelibly in the moral regeneration of the world through the name of Christ. Arrived at the end of the fatiguing journey, it soon was

night, and the three disciples, wrapped in their coats, fell asleep. Jesus withdraws a little space "to pray." There, shut out from the world, from the hum of men; shut in by the mountain crags and desolation and darkness; alone—He went to prayer. And who shall tell the burden of His prayer? Was it for strength to go to Jerusalem? Was it that the three sleepers might be persuaded of His glory?—And for long He prayed. It was nearing the hour of sunrise when "He was transfigured" before the awakened three. Awful and mysterious, ghostly and impressive, must have been the whole transaction, there in the utter stillness, darkness, and solitude of the mount!

5. Well might Peter for evermore call it "the holy mount." In itself, not more holy than other hills, the hills on which Jerusalem or Rome was built; but Peter here received deep spiritual impressions; it was therefore the "mount of God" to him—the holy place. And all true men have their holy mounts, their holy places. They may be holy to no one else. But wherever self-will has been surrendered and God been enthroned; wherever a great vow has been made, or a weakness overcome; wherever faith has been revived as by a special outshadowing of the true God; wherever bright

visions have filled us with the spirit of devotion; wherever we have felt the bright cloud of love spread over us, heard the voices of the distant and dead, seen the earthly converted the heavenly, and by them been renewed in the spirit of our mind, and aroused to greater moral might, and quickened to a truer perception of the pure, noble, true, and beautiful; —wherever these spiritual incidents have occurred, in cleft of a rock by the sea-shore, or on heights by the mountain tarn, in still night communion with God by the open window, when the spirit would not let the body sleep, in church or shop, on ocean or in the fields,—the scene will hallow the spot; the spot for evermore will be the sacred spot of our transfiguration.

6. *HE was transfigured. WE may be transfigured. He was transfigured IN ORDER THAT we may be transfigured.* "We all with open face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image of the Lord, from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit."

I.—HE WAS TRANSFIGURED IN PERSONAL APPEARANCE.

7. "His face did shine as the sun," *Matt.*,—"The fashion of His countenance was altered," *Luke*,—so that "His raiment became shining," *Mark*,—"white

as the light," *Matt.*,—"glistering," *Luke.* An actual luminosity appearing upon the human body has been remarked by physicians as a strange phenomenon attendant upon sickness. This was not that; but will serve to show the physical possibility of such emission of light. We all, too, know a higher fact,—how the human countenance may be lit up by joy; how plain features may be beautified by affection; how the face will pale when a beam of God's light has touched the soul; and how a wonderful transfiguration is sometimes effected in the dying hour by a realisation of peace and blessedness. It is a great truth,—a lovely soul throws loveliness around the person; beauty of spirit beautifies the face, which is the divinest part of human body.

8. We often call a little child that is good, pure, and true to itself, an angel. Why? Because of its littleness, or the regularity of its features, or its personal perfection? No; not so much as because of its luminousness. Its goodness overspreads its features; its purity brightens its ways; its truth glistens from its eyes:—its soul has transfigured it. Have you ever gazed on the portrait of John Fletcher of Madeley? Taken to pieces the face is very far from perfect, true: yet his saintly soul spread such a seraphic glow over it, that we instinctively yield it

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bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it, but he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." Come what should, chance what might, weak as they perhaps should prove themselves, from Mount Hermon streamed into the heart of Peter, James, and John a diviner influence than the Prophet of Nazareth had before exercised. Because of that revelation of His glory, there burst from them towards Him an adoration, which only became deeper, truer, more singular, with the lapse of time.

13. And the three disciples, they too were transfigured;—transfigured by faith in the transfigured Christ. For—

> "A thing of Beauty is a joy for ever—
> Its loveliness increases. It will never
> Pass into nothingness: but still will keep
> A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
> Full of sweet dreams and health and quiet breathing.
> Therefore on every morrow are we wreathing
> A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
> Spite of despondence; of the inhuman dearth
> Of noble natures; of the gloomy days;
> Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways
> Made for our searching. Yes, in spite of all,
> Some shape of Beauty moves away the pall
> From our dark spirits."

The transfigured Christ became to the disciples the most beautiful thing of Life. *He, It,* therefore trans-

figured them. It is what is seen by the soul that shapes the external spectacle presented to others. They went from the mountain persuaded in very truth that "God was in Christ," that the glory of the Most High was disguised behind a robe of flesh. As evermore they listened to the teachings of the Son of Man they felt the burning impression that through those eyes looked omniscience, and that below that bosom was beating the very Love of God. And they said, "This is the true God and eternal Life; for the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The mind of John expands to the most spiritual and sublime conceptions of Truth, Beauty, Love, Life. James comes on from crude ideas of worth and greatness to manifest a fidelity, calmness, intrepidity, and heroism which entitles him to a place in the world's pantheon. The simple, uncultured Peter pleads eloquently with the multitude, argues subtlely with the learned, declaims with readiness and force when dragged to the bar, and exhibits in common with his brethren a versatility to which is found no parallel in the leaders of any revolution. And these men turned the world upside down. Fishermen of Galilee were triumphant over the then existing powers of intellect, wealth, and empire. Is it asked,

How account for their success? The answer is, The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ transfigured the disciples; and because they were transfigured men they metamorphosed society;—for thus says Peter, speaking for all, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were high witnesses of His majesty." And all through the ages, anywhere, in any circumstances, it is a historical fact, that faith in the Carpenter of Nazareth, that He is the Son of the living God,—in the Crucified Jesus, that He is the Christ of the Father for the redemption of the world,—has transfigured man, crucified his evil habits, breathed precious consolation to him in his afflictions, formed in him the love and life of goodness and truth, and given him serenity, even joy, in death. Light illumines. Faith in Beauty, creates the Beautiful. The Sight of the Noble and True, inspires.

14. *Faith in the Mountain Glory of Christ is still the transforming power among men.** Night is, with its coldness, dulness, and death. The living are asleep, and the voice of the songsters is not heard in the grove. But let the Light of morning glory gild the mountain-tops, and soon all is resuscitated to life,

* Comp. Mark ix. 2, and Rom. xii. 2, Gr.

and might, and gladness. The flower in winter is hidden beneath the surface of the earth: it is emaciated, buried, seemingly dead. But let the Spring glory be felt, and it rises into newness, strength, and beauty. A similar destiny awaits us. Let the moral ear be opened, let the moral eye be unsealed, let the heart shrine the vision of Hermon, and "as we have borne the image of the earthly Adam, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly." Through faith in the glory of Jesus Christ, a divine fire is kindled upon the altar of the heart,—a fire that will burn up sin, and consume the sensual,—a fire that will transfigure us into Peters and Johns, and in the coming future, into the glorious image of Jesus Himself. We shall become more like Him in personal appearance and in personal influence the more we apprehend and shrine in our deepest being *who* He was, *what* He was, *where* He is, and *what* He is. And Mount Hermon answers these questions. *Who was He?* The weak Son of Man going into the mount to His God and Father. *What was He?* The favoured Child of the Invisible, elected to be the Lamb, the Light, the Life. *Where is He now?* In the bosom of the Father. *And what is He now?* The sinner's High Priest; the doubter's Mediator.

15. Does a deep, swelling wish fill our soul, "O,

that I were transfigured into the Pure, Good, True, Beautiful, Strong?" In response to whatever moral hunger we feel,—to all our out-reachings and longings of soul,—Christ Jesus says, "He that cometh to me shall never hunger. He that believeth on me shall never thirst." And there comes a confirming voice from the excellent glory, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; *hear Him.*"

NOTE.

MORALITY AND FAITH IN CHRIST.

"Morality is the body, of which the faith in Christ is the soul—so far indeed its earthly body, as it is adapted to its state of welfare on earth, and the appointed form and instrument of its communion with the present world; yet not *terrestrial*, nor of the world, but a celestial body, and capable of being transfigured from glory to glory, in accordance with the varying circumstances and outward relations of its moving and informing spirit."—*Coleridge.*

II.

THE HEAVENLY VISITORS.

"Behold, there talked with him two men, who were Moses and Elias."—LUKE ix. 30.

1. THE scene on Mount Hermon was a rehearsal of the Resurrection. *His* form, which had bent under a load of trial and sorrow, now erected itself, like a palm-tree from pressure. His brow expanded; its wrinkles of care fled. His eye looked forth, like the sun from behind a cloud. A smile, full of light, and eloquent, sat upon His lips. A glory, more glowing than that of oriental sky at sunrise, transfigured Him. Visitors from the "silent land" came to Him, and held converse with Him. A voice from the Shechinah testified His divine sonship and the Father's satisfaction.

2. And what was this grand scene on Mount Hermon? It was not illusion. The visions were not optical deceptions, nor the voices fancies of the ear.

It was not a mere mental vision, a dream, a vision in a dream, or a dream accompanied by a thunderstorm: although it is not to be forgotten that no vision is so real, and no voices so distinct, as the *mental.* Nor is this transfiguration scene a myth. It is not to be classed with the fables of Greece or Rome. Nor is it a real occurrence, but with mythical embellishments, as Ewald regards it. And less worthy of credit than either of these, is that interpretation which makes it a meeting between Jesus and two secret, unknown adherents. No: if any weight may be given to the historical air of the three narratives, by writers truly not eye or ear witnesses, but yet independent of each other, and two of whom probably never met; also to the substantial agreement of the three, yet with sufficient distinctiveness to prevent the idea of collusion from entering the minds of their readers;—if any weight to the presumptive and only alternative, that this most grand of conceptions and sublime of scenes was the creation of uncultured enthusiasts, those enthusiasts being unpoetic seamen of the Galilean lake;—if any weight to the unbroken naturalness of Christ's life and ministry; all of Him, about Him, and by Him, so simple, unobtrusive, calm, self-possessed, so opposed to the ecstatic, the mystical, the grand:—if any weight may be given to these

things, then the Transfiguration is a fact; the visions of Christ, the old saints, and the divine glory were realities; the voices of social conversation, and the voice out of the cloud, were not mere spiritual perceptions, but intelligible sounds that fell on the ear. A *miracle* then? Be it so; "the mere fact of miracle was but a syllable in Christ's magnificent doctrine of life."

3. We make too much of this question of *Miracles*. To say with Theodore Parker, "I do not believe there ever was a miracle, or ever will be; everywhere I find law,—the constant mode of operation of the infinite God," is to base our unbelief upon a statement which at best is but a half-truth. Our experience is of two worlds,—the world of matter and the world of mind. In the material world all research tends towards the establishment of a system of fixed and inevitable succession. In the mental world all experience testifies to the presence of contingency and free-will. Further, we daily live in the consciousness that mind can and does interfere with the successions of matter. May we then ignore the constant interchange of the relations of matter and mind, and establish a theory of the universe on material principles alone? But even if the constant mode of operation were a whole-truth, it could not prove a

miracle to be an impossibility: for our conception of *law* is as finite as our conception of a miracle; and God is Infinite and Absolute. To assume that the Infinite and Absolute God never arbitrarily interposes in the universe, never departs from that ordinary course of His providence which we have discovered and called *Law*, involves the greater assumption that we, who have only a limited capacity of Thought and Research, are intimately and perfectly acquainted with the Divine nature and purposes:—an assumption which is an absurdity. We are therefore not prepared to accept the canon which some have laid down, that whatever is miraculous is unhistorical: and least of all are we prepared to follow Dr Strauss in his application of the canon to the life of Jesus Christ. For (1.) in Himself, apart from any miracles He may have wrought, Jesus Christ is a unique *Moral* miracle; and (2.) all the miracles commonly associated with His history have a redemptive and beneficent character which strangely responds to the inextinguishable consciousness of a direct and positive intercourse of man with God, of God's influence upon man, and of man's influence upon God. Because in all other respects the story of the Transfiguration commends itself as reliable, the mere fact that it involves the miraculous cannot overthrow it. We accept the story as historical.

4. And what a sublime picture! Where is the poet to conceive it? the painter to pencil it? The three glorified ones on the right of the unspeakably bright cloud, the three non-glorified on the left,—all around, beneath, above, darkness, a darkness felt, a darkness visible, save where here and there, in the giddy heights, snow-covered jutting crags glisten with the reflected radiance of the "cloud." Six *representative* men holding holy meeting with God,—six *Jews* too; a picture of the "whole family;" a communion of the far-off ancients and the latest generation, of those below and those above, of the Lord with His aged sons and His little ones; a picture of the Church universal and eternal, that part yet militant here, that other part triumphant and passed away. Do we say our heart cannot feed on sublimities? we cannot make a home of the cold magnificence of a theology? we cannot shine the Infinite in our heart? Do we sometimes feel lost in abstractions, like we may have felt when on some mountain solitude in the deepening twilight? Behold here is a picture conceived for us by God Himself, and this is the interpretation,—*Man has not two lives but one life; one life but two homes; two homes under the One Father's care.*

5. In the visit of Moses and Elias to Jesus on this

occasion there is a twofold revelation made, which it concerns us to understand.

I.—THE CONSCIOUS EXISTENCE OF DEPARTED MEN.

The disciples saw "two men." They had the human form, but "appeared in glory;" that is, either the disciples with the visionary perception of the inner man were gazing into the spirit-world; or with the bodily eye they saw two substantial forms, human, only with more grandeur, nobleness, beauty, spirit-like glow. The latter would seem to be the more correct idea. These two men were "Moses and Elias." Whether by intuition, or the conversation between the two visitors and Jesus, the disciples learned their names, matters little. Here is Moses, alive, with a "glorious body," nearly fifteen centuries after God had buried him in one of the ravines among the mountains of Moab. And here with Moses is Elias, who, after our fashion of reckoning, is six hundred years his junior. Not only the Church on Earth and the Church in Heaven meet on this holy mount, but members of the Church in Heaven, who when on earth were separated by a dozen generations. They are companions in glory, and one in knowledge. They are on one mission, and speak with Jesus on the same subject. They have memory, social affec-

tions, knowledge of the "to come," and the gift of speech, nay, the gift of tongues, for the language of Jesus and the disciples was far other than that of Moses in the desert, or Elijah in the court of Ahab.

6. Now the disciples had heard of the Pharisees who believed in the immortality of the soul, and of the Sadducees who denied the resurrection. The Master too, they heard Him speak of the dead as yet living, and of the good, true, and believing as never to die. Nevertheless, chambers were dug in the limestone sides of the hills. The eye of the father dulled and his sons carried him to darkness; the lips of the mother grew cold and her daughters wailed for her as never to return: Rachel, did she ever come back to Jacob? and the Prophets and Fathers, where are they? Therefore this vision on the mount was a most grateful revelation; it was a bringing "life and immortality to light." It said to them, it says to us, *No Moses, no Elias, but lives on though he has tasted death: and lives on in a human bodily form.*

7. We wish for immortality: The thought of *not being* is horrible. That thought and that wish are an argument for the immortality of every man who indulges the one or is conscious of the other. There are hours also when the best life seems a failure to

him who has lived it. His soul reaches after some far-off, bright, and goodly thing which he sees or dreams he sees. He feels the insufficiency of the present to attain it. His heart condemns him too: himself is not what he might have been, ought to be: and "God is greater than his heart." These are indications of *that* man's *possible* immortality. But Jesus did not instruct the disciples in scholastic philosophy; and it is very improbable they themselves should resolve such experiences into the doctrine of immortality. Jesus spake of the For-ever-life as a simple possible fact; He lived before them in the light of it; and now, on Mount Hermon, all possible doubt is for ever hushed by the personal glory of Christ and the appearance of Moses and Elias. Now and for evermore they could say, and we may say, "We know; we are confident; we are willing; desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven."

8. Panœtius, the founder of Roman Stoicism, maintained that the soul perished with the body; Marcus Aurelius never rose above a vague and mournful aspiration; nor did Plato reason himself into a doctrine of immortality that afforded him any delight or moral strength. Among the Jews the Sadducees denied a future life; and it obtained only a faint and uncertain hold of the Pharisees. Here, on the Mount, not only

immortality is a demonstrated fact; but also something of its character is made manifest. Pain, sorrow, anguish, despair change vastly, not the form, but the appearance of men. Moses and Elias were *men*, but men of very different appearance to Peter, James, and John who beheld them. What a difference in one and the same person, when his countenance is all radiant with youth and beauty, and lighted up with the morning dawn of Hope; and when he is laid upon the bed of fever, wasted, worn, and wan. How changed the man from his own very self when a giddy Youth, or a helpless Babe. *The Body is moulded by the soul:* and it would seem here taught that when the soul shall put off this one body it *can* put on another;—in form the same; in appearance changed; in reality, another and eternal. As every hour advances the grub towards, and ultimately through a death, unto the creation of a new body,—the spirit within being one and the same, and indeed the moving cause of the metamorphosis; so every day of life a man's body is receiving its condition from the Spirit; until at last, two men, being dead, the one a meek, true, loving, heavenly-minded man, the other oppositely, not only are their souls in different conditions, but the bodies put off and the new bodies assumed have the distinctive qualities and impress

of the Spirit.—Can the Spirit *be* and *do* without a Body?—Elisha slumbers in his bones. Elijah's body was transfigured by his aspiring, saintly soul. Moses' body of sin mingled with the dust of Moab, but the freed soul wove for itself a more glorious body, a second and a better self.

9. What is the Spirit? What is the Life? The hard corn-grain is buried and subjected to death and destruction; yet the Spirit, the Life, the invisible and intangible Something, appropriates atoms from its surroundings, and by the law of assimilation, with which all Life is endowed, converts them into the fluid and substance of a new body; a body of a higher form, with stalk, leaves, and ear. The body is not a mere shell or garment. It is the co-operating partner of the Spirit, the Life. It takes on the condition of the Spirit, the Life. "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?" "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies." "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." "We, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we groan within ourselves, looking for the adoption, to wit, *the redemption of our body*."

10. There was, however, more than the conscious existence of the departed revealed in this visit to Jesus and the disciples on Mount Hermon.

Through Moses and Elias there was a revelation of—

II.—THE CENTRAL PRINCIPLE OF ALL TRUE LIFE—SELF-SACRIFICE.

What is it they come to speak with Jesus about? Do they speak of the mysteries that hang, like so many mists on the mountain tops, or clouds in the sky, around God's Providence? Do they explain how it is God permits Sin, Darkness, Sorrow, Death? Do they allude to the Fall of Man or God's great Mercy in providing for his recovery? No: Of what then? They "*spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem:*"—how "it became Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons into glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Hitherto the ministry of Jesus has seemingly been a great success. He was accepted as a "Prophet," as a "Teacher sent from God." Everywhere crowds greeted Him—His path had been upwards. Now is a crisis. He has spoken of the "end." He has uttered the word "suffering." Many are offended. The most attached are mystified. And His soul is "exceeding sorrowful." Is every step He shall now take, downwards? Must He go to Golgotha? Is

there no other way? And He retires to the solitary Mount, to hold communion with the Father. He takes with Him Peter, James, and John, both for sympathy, and because they too need light and strength and grace. And to Him, and to them, the Father sent Moses and Elias.

11. Why Moses? Why Elias? A thought not without beauty is suggested with respect to Moses. Earnestly he had prayed that he might enter Canaan, but God said, No; not now. Ages after a grave had been made for him in the valley, Moses now stands within the limits of the promised land. If the sacred soil had any crowning honour it was when the feet of Jesus walked it; and Moses is detained at the gate till he should look upon it in His company. How God can bear a prayer in memory, and at the last give and do more than is asked! But this is no answer to the question we propose ourselves. Why Moses rather than the High Priest Aaron? Why Elias rather than the Messianic Seer Isaiah? Aaron, more than Moses, was a type of the "Son of Man;" and Elias never prophesied of the "Prince of Peace."

12. *Moses was the Prophet of Law.* Without doubt he was a prophet of God, for all believe in him. The words he uttered nearly thirty centuries

since in the wilderness to a people despised and outcast influence the opinions and rule the conduct of the whole world of to-day. Its life and property are protected, and its civil and moral codes moulded by the laws of Sinai. Now what is the principle on which the decalogue of Moses is built? Is it not *Self-sacrifice.* A little consideration will confirm this.

13. The ten commandments divide themselves into two tables. The principle of the one table is, *Let man sacrifice himself to God.* For it is written,—1. Thou shalt have no God beside me :—that is, sacrifice thyself to *me*, the self-revealed, one, true God. 2. Thou shalt make no image :—that is, sacrifice thy imaginings, reasonings, tastes, desires, to *me*, firstly, alway. 3. Thou shalt not take my name in vain :—that is, sacrifice thy self-interest to my honour. 4. Thou shalt keep a Sabbath :—that is, sacrifice a seventh portion of thy time to my worship and glory. 5. Honour thy parents :—that is, sacrifice thy will and pleasure to thy father and mother, who to thee are in the stead of me. And the principle of the other table, what is it but this? *Let man sacrifice himself to his brother man.* For 6. Thou shalt not kill :—that is, sacrifice thy anger. 7. Thou shalt not commit adultery :—that is, sacrifice thy passions. 8. Thou shalt not steal : that is, sacrifice the opportunity

to get what is not rightfully thine. 9. Thou shalt not bear false witness :—that is, sacrifice thy judgment and revenge. 10. Thou shalt not covet :—that is, sacrifice thy desires. In a word, sacrifice thyself for thy brother's good.

14. The Divine Truth, then, which God planted in the world by Moses was this,—Self-sacrifice is the central principle of all true, noble, manly, beautiful, blessed life. For what is the Law but all which God's benignant Fatherhood could conceive of as good to the subjects of His paternal rule? Within and behind Law is principle; and principle is the very Being of God. Laws are intended to discipline us to understand principles: to assist us, educate us, to *become* sons. Who will not hear the law, live out the law, which He has ordained, cannot enter into the higher, truer Sonship. Having discovered this, we can understand why Moses was one of the sacred messengers sent from the Father to strengthen the Son of Man, and to enlighten Peter, James, and John.

15. But why Elias? *Elias was the prophet of Judgment.* Israel had forsaken the Lord. Moses they understood not. The land was filled with violence and misery. On every high hill was a grove to some false Deity. Elias would bring Israel to a better mind, to repentance, to a newness of heart, to true-

ness of life, by *judgment:* "let there be no rain." But the thought was wrong. It was founded in error. Therefore his plan of converting Israel came to nought. Bitterly did he feel his want of success: "It is enough; take away my life; I am not better than my fathers." And he went and stood on the bleak, solitary height where Moses stood six centuries before. "And behold, the Lord passed by; and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire *a still small voice.*" What was the revelation, if not this? *Gentleness not judgment is the way of the Lord: self-sacrifice is the law of His providence.* He seeks to save, to recover the lost, to redeem the captive, by sacrificing His sense of Justice to Mercy, His feeling of Indignation to patient Good-doing, His Power to Restraint. Elias was for judgment. God would show Elias the more excellent way of self-restraint, self-sacrifice. Judgment is as the wind among the mountains. Indignation is as the fire among the rocks. The Self-restraint of Love is as the still small voice that finds its echo in the very depths of the soul. The propriety of Elias accompanying

Moses in His mission of sympathy and comfort is therefore somewhat clear to us.

16. Of the "sons of the morning" none could enter into the position and work of Jesus, in so full a manner as to afford Him strength or comfort, for they were never *men*, had never tasted human infirmities or sorrows. And of those who had, and who still were men, but passed hence, who so fit to talk with Him of "the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" as the Lawgiver of Israel and the Prophet of Fire?

17. *They spake of His "decease:"*—Was the salvation of men, the redemption of the race, to be the glory of the Christ? That glory could only come forth in suffering. Only the Cross could beget it. For only in enduring death and overcoming death could He make men feel His oneness with God; and only so could His oneness with men become a moral power over the conscience and heart. They spake of His "decease:" for He was to be "God manifested in the flesh," the God of Moses, the God of Elias. He was to write in blood, in His own blood, the revelations of the Father made by Moses and Elias. He was to be the Truth, the Way, the Light, the Life, the Bread from Heaven, the Consuming Fire. Therefore there must be an absolute giving up of Himself: He must

be, in living, throbbing, bleeding flesh, the God of the Law, and the God of Long-suffering Mercy. They spake of His "decease:"—of His exodus from Calvary to glory: of the time when His life, as a little seed sown in the earth, should grow to proportions more vast than the tree of the primeval forest. They spake of the time when His Cross should be the centre of life planted in the moral heavens; hushing every conflicting element, melting every cloud into sunshine, and making humanity radiant with purity and resonant with the music of heaven. They spake of the time when the Father should look down upon the moral world, as He did upon the material, and pronounce all things "well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ."

18. And Jesus was comforted, strengthened. Now He could say, "Father, we are One." As in a piano two chords are united to make one sound, so the will of Jesus was now united with the will of the Father to create a motive power that should save the world,—ennoble it, purify it, glorify it. What if the people would not hear Him? if disciples withdraw from Him? if the priests of the Father's house should cast Him out? What if the world should mock the idea of a crucified Saviour? He could now leave all issues. Now He could rest His soul. For true rest

is the rest of unity. And He went down from Hermon with a resolute and steady step. He walked from Hermon towards Jerusalem, great, firm, noble in faith. Yet He came to know unrest again; and sought out a Gethsemane before He could go to a Calvary.

19. And there was a lesson for Peter, James, and John; and for us too:—*Mere life is nothing, mere dying is nothing; but sacrifice to God for God's sake, and to man for man's sake, this is that which ennobles life and converts death into glory.* The disciplined man enjoys the spoils of a large conquest; in conquering himself he has conquered his principal foe: and all our life is discipline. He who loses himself rises into the higher life, the life of Christ, the eternal life, the life of God. The arcana of divine life and beauty are manifested, and glimpses break forth through the darkness from Mount Hermon to cheer the humblest pilgrim. For evermore in the light of that countenance which was altered, and of that carriage which was glorified, all human countenances may acquire a brightness, all common things be transfigured. Oh, if our hearts are endeavouring after right, truth, purity, eternal life, He who sought Hermon in His own trembling hour, will give us wisdom, love, might. But if we defy God and His revela-

tions; if ours is the spirit that scorns purity, meekness, faith, eternity; if pride, passion, pleasure are our ideals, we shall yet tremble with a deadly trembling, as the skeleton leaves of the trees that sigh and shiver and become castaway in the November wind.

III.

THE DEPARTURE OF THE VISION.

"As they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here."—LUKE ix. 33.

1. How painful is the awaking moment from a dream! "A dream is from God;"—whether that very ancient word be a truth, or no; whether the visions and voices that haunt us in sleep are strange, stuttering, ill-understood messengers of the Infinite, or no; we all know the sense of pain with which we have awakened from a pleasant dream; we all know how an undefined fear has sometimes interwoven itself with our waking hours after a horrible dream in the night. Or who among us has not played the seer over the winter fire? Who, lying on the grass in the sultry summer-time, has not been a dreamer of dreams? What mother has not bent over her boy until she has lost herself in visions of his manhood? What seaman has not seen visions and heard voices, goodly and fami-

liar, though all alone keeping watch on deck, a thousand miles from home? And what a pleasure has been torn from us when the vision has departed, and we have awaked from our dreamings to the real and the present!

2. Yet the dream and the awaking to find it only a dream are for good. The young need dreams to develop their energies. We all need to nurse our affections and imagination that when some droop, we who remain may come into the failing battle of life. Our visions are never realised. The golden islets far away pass into clouds. The gorgeous sparkle we gaze upon dissolves into the stern reality of storm and struggle. 'Tis well: for the dream, interpreted aright, calls forth the spirit *Endeavour*, and out of the vision comes the angel *Hope*, to encourage the hand and nerve the heart. The dream may depart, the vision vanish, when the spirit the dream has evoked, and the angel which has visited us in the vision, have made us stronger to fight the fight of present life, made us better able to bear the contradictions, reverses, and trials which are in reserve for us. It was the weak, unthinking Peter exclaimed as the holy vision dissolved, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; let us build three tabernacles." It was the departing of the vision made Peter strong to meet

the hard world, which was spread out at the foot of Hermon.

3. The Hermon vision was only for a little while. Peter would have the heavenly visitors tarry. He would detain them. For while they were present and held converse with Jesus, the hearts of the disciples were warmed, were filled with a holy rapture; their minds too were being enlightened; they were learning goodly lessons of truth. If they now departed, would they ever return? If they would but stay, what questions might they not answer, what doubts resolve. The good desire and the error of Peter are very manifest. He was ready to renounce the world; but rather by an outward separation from it, than by an inward life of the soul. He would perpetuate the good and delight of this spiritual fellowship; but rather by giving it an outward and fixed form, than by converting the temporary vision into a spring of hidden life and character. He would have Moses, Elias, and Jesus, for ever abide on the Mount; for then he and James and John would be truer, purer, stronger men; "not knowing what he said." But Moses went away, Elias went away, and the Glory departed; and the deserted Mount blessed Peter more than the Mount glorified, as the empty cradle has blessed many a parent more than the

cradle filled. The blossom fades before the fruit forms. Continuous sunshine would be a blessing turned into a curse.

> "Aromatic plants bestow
> No spicy fragrance while they grow;
> But crush'd or trodden to the ground
> Diffuse their balmy scents around."

4. If then, in these remarks, are correctly indicated Peter's thought and feeling which prompted his remark to Jesus, and the philosophy of the departure of Moses and Elias in opposition to his express desire, there are three divine truths revealed to us.

I.—SECLUSION FROM THE WORLD IS NOT PURE RELIGION.

> "Now surely, thought I, there 's enou'
> To fill life's dusty way;
> And who will miss a poet's feet,
> Or wonder where he stray?
> So to the woods and wastes I 'll go,
> And I will build an ozier bower,
> And sweetly there to me shall flow
> The meditative hour."

In this beautiful fragment poor Kirke White fondly indulges the dream of a hermit life, quiet, meditative, solitary. The dream is common to a certain period of life between boyhood and manhood, and to a certain period of mental and moral development. It

would seem to have its origin in a latent timidity which shrinks from grappling with the stern trials and temptations of a crowding and busy world, supposed to be inimical to true worth, goodness, and purity. It is the timidity of the young bird, which with untried wing and undeveloped powers meets the biting east wind, and calling it an evil wind, shrinks back to its nest.

5. Lifted into the region of religion, we have here the thought and feeling which created among the Jews the Essenes of Palestine, and the Therapeutæ of Egypt: sects which must have been well known to Peter and his brethren. Misinterpreting the genius of Christianity, a later age beheld the land of its founder, the deserts of Egypt, and the wilds of Syria, peopled with thousands of men and women, who thought to become better women, and stronger, truer men, by an utter abnegation of the world's company and business. The modern monasticism of the Roman and Greek hierarchies is founded in the same fallacy. It is the religion of the child; the bloom of the forced plant of the hothouse; the cold, uninspiring light of the aurora of the polar regions. "*Laudo nuptias, laudo conjugium, sed quia mihi virgines generant,*" said S. Jerome. How little had he grasped the divine idea of life!

6. No man ever was a better man by such seclusion, as no man will ever be a worse man by engaging actively and enthusiastically in the right and common things of human life. Indeed, the want of objects of natural affection must harden the heart: solitude with our own thoughts cannot but create an undue attachment to personal opinions, as *the* right, *the* true: while the absence of comparison with other minds and hearts, and the undeviating round of worship, must naturally foster superstition and ignorance. To separate ourselves from society in order to have God and the things of eternity always consciously in mind, is the sure way to become bigoted, fanatic, and superstitious. And in the early Church there are notices of the suicide of monks, sometimes to escape the world, sometimes through despair at their inability to quench the propensities of the flesh, sometimes through insanity produced by their dread of surrounding demons. But to have God in our hearts as the governing power of life, and to carry a love for Him about with us consciously and unconsciously, as the child carries his love for father and mother, this is our calling and safety and strength. For "religion is no new thing grafted in upon nature; but it is nature won over and warmed into its true, strong, pure growth." Christ Jesus came into the world to quicken

man to pure religion. Therefore though Peter said, "It is good for us to be on this mount; alone with Moses, Elias, and Thee; let us stay here;" Moses went away, Elias went away, and the Glory departed from Jesus. God would have them go down from the mount into the world; to fight, in order to grow into grace; to endeavour, in order to be truly religious. The unexercised arm has little muscular power; the unpractised fingers can produce no liquid harmonies; the rocks and clouds are very silent; it is action, it is life, make things musical. As no earthly parent, so God, loves not dry, weak, exotic-like natures, but full, vigorous, joyous ones that pour out their energies in efforts to be, to do, to bear. This, not seclusion or asceticism, is pure religion before God and the Father.

7. A second truth taught by the departure of Moses, Elias, and the Glory, contrary to the desire of Peter, is this:—

II.—THE TRUE MEASURE OF THE VALUE OF THINGS IS THEIR USEFULNESS TO FORM CHARACTER.

Character, as the sum and expression of all qualities, is a real and essential property of human being. It exerts power over external circumstances, bending them in its own direction, or breaking its instruments against

what cannot bend. The nature of an acorn turns the dews, air, soil and sunbeams into an oak; and though circumstances may destroy its power to produce an oak, they cannot make it produce an elm. A similar power is in man; and it is a terrible power. Education may affect my moral character; training may be to it as a mould; but it will ever be the *Ego* of me. I cannot shake it off. It has grown with my growth, strengthened with my strength. It speaks, walks, moves; is felt in every look of the eye, word of the lip, effort of the will, act of the life.

8. Indeed, *moral character is man's realest property.* Land, houses, money, are man's only for a time: taste, fancy, the power to get and to enjoy are man's only for a set season of life. Man's very existence is not his own; it is in the hands of his Maker. But character is more really a man's own; for though he die, and the world roll from under his feet, with all on it that he called his, *it* will never depart from him: and, though circumstances and persons have contributed to its colouring and power, it is more our own creation than anything else we possess. God gives us being, time, surroundings, circumstances; but not character: that is for us to build up, to will, to create. Our moral character we are creating consciously or unconsciously, every day, every hour.

"For character groweth day by day, and all things aid it in unfolding.
Scratch the green rind of a sapling, or wantonly twist it in the soil,
The scarred and crooked oak will tell of thee for centuries to come;
Even so may'st thou guide the mind to good, or lead it to the moorings of evil,
For disposition is builded up by the fashioning of impressions."

9. *Great and small,* therefore, *are terms that only have a true meaning in relation to character; and there can be nothing trifling.* The blade of grass sustains a relation to the widest landscape. Every action has a meaning. A thought of the mind, whence or howsoever suggested, is indissolubly connected with human destiny. The morning sunlight and the morning rain-cloud seem wide apart in their purpose, may at times also seem to obstruct each other; but they have one great end. Sun and rain come to the dying seed, and both together draw it from the darkness into the light, and build it up into the blade, then the ear, and the full corn in the ear. Both are rich too in times of refreshment: the sun, after the dark night; the rain, after the parched day: and after both, the flower raises its head, the birds sing, men are glad. Both come, both depart; in coming and going they build up, they create. Circumstances, occurrences, purposes, efforts,—these are the sunlight and rain-cloud.

Moral character,—this is the seedling and flower. The former are great or small according as they build up in life; that is, as they build up man in Strength, Beauty, Truth, Goodness, Purity, Love.

10. Did Peter, James, and John see a vision on Mount Hermon? Did they receive direct communications from the other world? The worth of those communications is to be measured by their effect on Peter's after-character, on the after-spirit of James, on John's after-faith. The glory of the vision is their moral transfiguration. *The vision and the voices were means of grace; no more: that is why the vision dissolved and the voices ceased.* Moses departed; but the doctrine of self-sacrifice was the inspiration of James. Elias went away; but the revelation of the love of God to Israel moulded the spirit of John. The glory dissolved; but Peter was stronger because humbled. To create these results was one divine reason why the transfiguration-scene was opened up to these three disciples. Through *them* and *it*, usefulness to form character is revealed to the world as God's measure of revelations, of men, and of things. Peter, James, and John are dead; have they not given the whole world a new character? Can their influence ever cease? Henry Martyn is dead—transfigured by the glory of Christ in Peter, James, and John; who shall count the

holy spirits which, phœnix-like, have started from his funeral pyre? Wilberforce is dead; but what negro for generations yet to come will not bend before his shrine and be inspired with the Spirit of Jesus that is in his memory for ever? The Singers of Israel are dead; but are not the "golden apples" they plucked from the "tree of life" still as fresh as when they newly gathered them, each into his "silver basket"? God gave them times, circumstances, revelations, grace, that out of them they should create a good, holy, true, noble, life-kindling character,—a character that should bless themselves and coming ages for ever. God is dealing with us, now and here, to the same end and purpose.

11. There is yet a third divine truth involved in the departure of Moses and Elias, contrary to the prayer of Peter. It is this:—

III.—THE DEPARTURE OF A VISION IS THE COMING OF THE STRENGTHENER.

It may be difficult at first sight to perceive the beauty and power of this truth. It is hard to comprehend how the death of a glorious dream, of a beautiful "flower of the home," or of a loved and loving friend, is "gain" to us. To be instructed by Moses, to hear the voice of Elias, to be in presence of the

glorified Christ Jesus,—would not this seem to be the most profitable of things that could befal Peter, James, or John, or *us?* The departure of the vision says "Not so." When the man of profound wisdom, large experience, and eminent piety, whose pure and saintly life, breathing the spirit of heaven, hallows, softens, ennobles all within the reach of its influence; —when the greatest and best this world has ever seen, whose whole life is a record of self-devoted, self-sacrificing zeal for the good of others;—when such as these go away, how can it advantage us? How can they become our strengtheners? The fading away of Moses, Elias, and the Glory from Mount Hermon suggests the answer. Peter, James, and John had to learn, as we all have to learn, *self-control—self-help—self-government.*

12. Who has no father, friend, or teacher shrined in the heart for ever? He has gone away in the body, but he is here in the spirit. While he was with us in the body we leaned on him; we did not act for ourselves; his word was our law; his counsel as the divine oracles: for he was wiser, better, stronger than we. And we were happy in our devotion; it elevated us. But presently the vision began to fade. He sickened; and our thought was, How can we do without him? And our prayer was, Lord, it is good

for him to be here; spare him to us! Yet he grew worse. At last he died. The Lord had shut out our prayer. We turned from his grave like an orphaned bird left to shift for itself in the wide world. After a while, however, we found we could think for ourselves, could act for ourselves. Better, too, than ever we expected to be able to think, to act. A spirit seemed to come from him to us, and bring all things to our remembrance, alike his words and his deeds. His words; they were more vivid, more deep, more full of meaning than they were when he spoke them. His deeds; they were more full of soul, of power. And that departure, which appeared so dangerous to us, and that denial to our prayer, which at the time was so disappointing and grievous, have really assisted us to *become* stronger, braver, truer souls. Without giving to the experience so chastely and correctly expressed in this illustration, the special point for which Canon Kingsley uses it, we thankfully accept it as explaining *why* Peter's request met with a silent denial, and *how* the departure of the vision was intended to be the coming of the strengthener.

13. *The same principle obtains alike in the material and mental worlds.* When we see the eye of day closed, and the beautiful vision of summer fade away; and clouds dense and dark gather, and the wind

rises; we tremble for the young tree and say, "Alas! it will be bent to the very earth: this shall retard its growth." Yet, is it so? The departure of the light leads to a more wide opening of the leaves and to the putting forth of greater effort to absorb the moisture of the air; and the wind makes it strike its roots deeper into the soil, and thrust its stem higher, till it shall feel strong enough to struggle with the tempests and overcome them by standing alone and "firm unto the end." The winds and darkness are no less educators of the tree than the sunshine and dews. *The Strengthener comes on the wings of night.* In the intellectual world the mind thrives on difficulties. God demands toil and travail and patient thought in order that man's intellect may rise to its proper stature. All experience goes to prove that there is no falser method of education than to make all things smooth, easy, sunny. *It cannot be otherwise in the spiritual world.* God gives; God takes away. He gives that we may be morally strong and pure; He takes away that we may be yet stronger and purer. He gives that we may have "life;" He takes away that we may have life "more abundantly." We may not undervalue darkness, conflict, loss; the quenching of the sunshine, ceasing of the voice, and removal of the loved and trusted. The joy of eternity strikes its

roots in the very bitterness of the spirit. There are flowers which only yield their fragrance in the night. A calm, wondrous strength is to be gotten from the chamber of death. Even now, God comes down in the night to wrestle with men; to be a seeming opponent to their good and happiness; to be a vengeance-taker on them for their sin: but all the while He is drawing out their strength that it may lay hold of His, and so become "more strength."

14. God was educating the disciples alike by the giving of the vision, and its departure; teaching them to think for themselves, to guide and govern themselves; constraining them to "walk by faith;" educating them to be true, simple, and single-minded children of their Father in heaven. He is educating us; teaching us; constraining us: the same lessons; in the same way.

IV.

JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD.

"This is my beloved Son."—MATT. xvii. 5; LUKE ix. 35.

1. A VOICE from out of a luminous cloud said this of Jesus, whom Peter was addressing. A *cloud* of fiery light; and spirit-like, as it comes from out of the depths of the sky: a *voice;* no form, no visibility, no outlined Being: only a voice uttered from a cloud of light: the Word clothed with light:—what a sublime conception of GOD!

2. And what a wonderful saying of the voice, "This is my beloved Son." This *Jesus* is *my* beloved Son: God and a Nazarene, Father and Son:—was it a dream, a fancy, a heated imagination that deceived Peter, James, and John? The character of the men, their worldly condition, *His* too, the slow and reluctant growth of their conviction of the fact involved in the saying of the Voice, the absence of motive to misrepresent, the surrender of their lives a sealing to their testimony,—all unite to give the narrative of the

Transfiguration,—so artless, so devoid of all attempt at colouring, so sublimely dramatic, and so utterly beyond recorded conceptions of the poets or philosophies of other contemporary peoples—a credibility and air of history that disarm prejudice and constrain faith.

3. But can the saying of the Voice be substantiated? Was Jesus a Son of God in a higher sense than we all are "sons of God?" Already the *thought* had been borne in upon the minds of the disciples. Demoniacs had cried out, giving Jesus this particular title. Peter would walk on the sea, but soon finds himself sinking: Jesus catches his hand, and Peter exclaims, "Of a truth, thou art the Son of God." The disciples all knew the current story of His birth, yet He asks them, "Whom say ye that I am?" and blesses Peter for His true and enthusiastic reply, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." To them Jesus is more than they themselves are—more than a prophet. The Voice only gave definiteness and shape to a conviction gradually borne in upon their minds and hearts. Say, after eighteen centuries of growth and research, is He less to us than He was to them? May He be? Can He be? Himself has given us a challenge:—"Say ye of Him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, 'Thou

'blasphemest,' because I said 'I am the Son of God?' If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not." The argument, then, may be shaped thus:—*If Jesus was the Son of God in any other than a human way, He being the child of Mary as a historical fact, then a certain unmistakable duality would of necessity characterise Him: also, if Jesus was the "beloved Son of God," in distinction from other men, who too are sons of God, then there must have been apparent in Him a uniqueness of piety in His bearing towards God, and a uniqueness in His relation to men as their Teacher.* We accept the argument, and in its discussion are prepared to find a substantiation of the saying of the Voice.

I.—JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD BY HIS MIRACULOUS BIRTH.

4. Let that be our first position. We may not stay to prove the credibility of the Evangelists: for the purpose we have in view it will be sufficient that we accept their memoranda as reliable history. We find it asserted therein that a messenger came to Mary, yet a virgin, and said, "That Holy Thing which shall be born of Thee shall be called the Son of God." And Luke, who carries up the genealogy of Jesus to the first man, concludes it in these words,

"who was the son of Seth, who was the son of Adam, who was the son of God." Taken in connection with the narrative of the miraculous birth, the meaning at least is this:—As Adam the first was the son of God because God made him out of earth and breathed into him His own breath, so Jesus was formed of the substance of Mary by the power of God, and received a special inspiration and life; was indeed "the second Adam, the Lord from heaven." Are we told, "This is a mystery?" We reply, "Every birth is a mystery." Is it rejoined, "Yes; but this is a deeper, stranger mystery; a mystery without its like in all history, unparalleled in human experience?" We make answer, "The mystery of the birth is in harmony with the mystery of the Christ of prophecy and history."

5. *A mysterious duality attends both.* As the Christ of *history*, at one time He multiplies a few loaves into bread for thousands; at another time sits fagged and hungry on the stones at a well's mouth, waiting for a little food which His disciples were gone to buy. He sleeps like a worn-out little child; yet awaked, calmly speaks His "Hush!" to the raging storm, and it is still. He raises the dead with a word spoken through choking tears; but presently is found declaring, "I cannot heal the sick *there*." He casts

in the teeth of the malicious religionists of that day, "I proceeded forth and came from God; you are of your father the devil:" yet with a troubled, quivering heart He says to three of His disciples, "Come, be near me; watch with me." He ever owns Mary His mother; but never speaks of any Father save God. Oftentimes he discerns the unspoken thoughts of those about Him; yet chose a Judas, one of the twelve nearest and dearest to His soul. He says, "Before Abraham was I AM;" yet taught, "the Son of Man must be lifted up." Indeed, all through His life we find this dualism. Is He the Word? Then one part of the sentence is plain, the other is haloed with strange glory or lost in gloom. This is a mere matter of fact.

6. And this same Jesus of Nazareth, garbed as a peasant, untaught by the sages of the time, unsupported by any visible authority, whose words are so mysterious, and character so unintelligible,—He says, "Search the Scriptures; open the scrolls and read the predictions concerning Him that cometh; consult the prophets, they testify of the Messiah: see if *I* bear not the signs of being *He.*" We open and read. And we find the Christ of *prophecy* is marked by the same dualism which attaches to the Christ of History. He is to be "a root out of a dry ground;"

yet also "the flower of Jesse and the plant of renown." He is to be "the desire of nations;" yet to be "despised and rejected of men." He is to be the "Child;" yet "the everlasting Father." He is to be "the man, Jehovah's fellow;" yet "numbered with transgressors." He is to be the "Son given;" yet "the Mighty God." And so through all the Old Testament writings that speak of Him. The prophecy and the life are different phases of the same paradox.

7. If, now, we reason forwards from the miraculous birth to His life, we say,—A common man cannot be expected after so extraordinary a beginning. He who was born of Mary and of God, *must* bear in His life-course a duality, comprehending the elements of Manhood and Godhood. Mary's nature at times must gleam forth in the beauty of its innocence, humility, weakness, and faith; God's in the grandeur of its wisdom, love, and might. If, on the other hand, we reason backwards from the life to His birth, we argue from a dualism so prominent, so sustained, and so unique, a beginning other than is known to ordinary humanity; and bringing this argument into association with the ideal Being, developed in the human mind through the ages, we conclude that the historical documents of the Evangelists, being worthy of our

acceptance as genuine, are also worthy of full credit when they therein narrate the miraculous birth of Jesus. In either case the saying of the Voice is confirmed. If not the "beloved Son" of God, what was He?

8. *The unbeliever must find a reply.* It remains for him, besides exposing any fallacy he may see in our argument, to account for the existence of such a character as that of Jesus Christ. He is bound to furnish satisfactory reasons, not only why Jesus Christ does not bear to him the marks of a divine fatherhood, but also how the conception of such a character, and the existence of the story of His birth, are otherwise to be explained. He must show—1. How this sinless Being, produced according to ordinary laws, could sanction and demand for Himself the title, "Son of God;" 2. How those earliest disciples of His, men of such illiberal education and narrow creed, should have been capable of conceiving such a peerless and unique character; and 3. How it has come to pass that this, to him, fiction of Jesus Christ's birth has been the means of ennobling and blessing humanity beyond compare with other religions? Personally, I can see no way out of these difficulties but in the adoption of Martha's confession, "I believe that thou art the Christ; the Son of God, who should come

into the world." Unbelief is a cold shadow;—the field looked beautiful, for the sun had driven away the hoar-frost of the night, and the grass looked all the fresher, sweeter, greener, save in one spot, namely, where the solitary tree cast its own shadow; but I observed that as the sun rose and shone, the shadow grew shorter and less dark, and the hoar-frost melted away.

9. Let us now turn to the other part of our argument.

JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD BY THE HOLY SPIRIT WHICH ANIMATED HIM.

John, one of the three disciples who heard the saying of the Voice which we are discussing, having spoken of the "Word" as "with God," and as "God," says, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father." He would have his readers understand that it was not the Word Itself which was beheld, but Jesus in whom the Word dwelt. A word before it is expressed is a thought; a word is the "express image" of the thought; the thought is the fulness of the word not yet made manifest; when it is manifested, when the thought is burned into words, it goes

forth into other hearts to work its influence there. The word is born of the thought; influence is the child of both. Jesus was the divine, eternal, creating Thought incarnated. Him the disciples beheld, and His spirit or glory was so conspicuous that they recognised Him to be the "only begotten of the Father":—there never was such One before; it was impossible there ever could be two such Ones. Now we too may look upon this same Jesus. The Gospels are the living Jesus, yet in the world. What manner of Being do we see? what is the Spirit which we observe animating Him?

10. First, we are struck with a *bearing emphatically and peculiarly His own.* He assumes an attitude of supremacy. "Ye are from beneath, I am from above;" "Behold, a greater than Solomon is here;" "I am the light of the world;" "He who loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." In a man, one of ourselves, the highest, wisest, noblest, what preposterous conceit! what absurd pretensions! as if all light and goodness were in Him alone! as if to be worthy of Him were the chief excellence of the race! Yet no reader is offended with Jesus Christ; no one thinks Him in error for assuming this attitude of supremacy; the idea of His vanity never occurs to one of a thousand readers of His life.

How is this?—We are struck also with His assumption of an *inherent affinity with God.* "I *and* the Father;" "*My* Father;" "*We* will come and make our abode:" what transcendant pretensions are here! What an idea of Himself does He give when He assumes the necessity of informing His disciples, "My Father is *greater* than I." Conceive a man, one of ourselves, thus speaking; thus conducting himself towards the Highest! Universal man would shudder at his blasphemy, and cover his name with obloquy. Yet during these eighteen centuries, no nation or tribe or people, who has read these sayings of Jesus, has been offended at His extravagance. How is this?—We are further struck with the *circumstance and condition* of Him who thus arrogates to Himself an excellence that never entered into the imaginations of poets or the dreams of kings. He has no powerful friends. He lives in the little, the mean, and the poor. The great world knows nothing of the Miracle-worker of Galilee. The philosophers of the age are ignorant of the existence of the Prophet of Nazareth, who proclaims Himself "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Now if a man, one of ourselves, occupied *His* lot, and lived *His* life, we should distress ourselves with wonder and pity and compassion. But we read the life of Jesus, and are

quite unconscious even of the compassionate feelings which prompted Peter on a memorable occasion to say, "Be it far from Thee, Lord; pity Thyself." We never think of extending to Him the sympathy which is awakened to others, who with noble and ambitious promptings are struggling with disadvantages and adversities. How is this?

11. The answer is simple and conclusive. We detect no disagreement between the merits and pretensions of Jesus: we *feel* He is a unique Being: we recognise in Him some one we cannot fathom. He is the contrast to all human experience. Human ideals are removed to an infinite distance from Him. Therefore we yield Him all homage, acknowledge His pretensions, and bow to the saying of the Voice: for the impression is as natural as it is strong, that He is One who "makes Himself of no reputation."

12. Our conviction of the divine Sonship of Jesus will be still more deepened by considering the *peculiarity of His piety and originality of His teaching.* First, concerning His *piety.* All human piety begins with repentance. Those, who, in the judgment of their fellows, live nearest to God, and know most about Him, are ever found the foremost to acknowledge a sense of their imperfection. And the human teacher relieves his natural sense of honesty by expressing

the discrepancy between his struggling, shortcoming self and the truth of God, which is his message. Every apostle says, "I have not attained." Every prophet cries, "Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips!" Every worshipper moans "God be merciful to me a sinner." The sense of unworthiness is universal and instinctive. But it is all otherwise with Jesus Christ. He never once confesses sin or asks for pardon. He never regrets anything He has been or done. He draws no line between His official and personal self. On the contrary, He challenges His accusers, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" and in dying solemnly appeals to God that He has given to the world unsullied the divine glory "full of grace and truth;" He cries "It is finished." Yet this deviation from ourselves does not beget in our minds the thought of intolerable presumption. Why not? Because beginning with an unrepentant piety, a consciousness of absolute sinlessness, the more we read of Him and scrutinise Him, the deeper it is borne in upon us that He holds that sinlessness to the end, and brings no visible stain upon it.

13. Then as to the *teaching* of Jesus. "Much," says Goethe, "is talked about originality, but what does originality mean? All that we can truly call our own is our energy, vigour, will. If I could enumerate

all that I really owe to the great men who have preceded me, and to those of my own day, it would be seen very little is my own." We all adopt Goethe's words. But that Jesus drew from other stores of learning is never pretended. He is not enriched with a single ray from Athens, or Alexandria, from the mystics of the Ganges, from the disciples of Zoroaster or Confucius. Neither is there anything in His doctrine or character which connects Him with any type of Jewish education. "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" was the question which betrayed the popular surprise caused by Jesus, who spake "with authority" new words, new doctrines. Is Shakespeare the most creative and original spirit the world has produced? is he the high priest of human nature? Then is Jesus something more than a man and greater than a human genius: for whereas Shakespeare builds on historic characters, and in all his works betrays human learning, Jesus in no allusions, opinions, or forms of speech betrays indebtedness to the literature of His own or a previous time. All His teaching, too, is just as full of divine nature as the great bard's is of human. If then, Jesus, was simply a man as other men, He was certainly a new and singular man, never previously nor since known to have His like,—one who was as great a miracle in the world

as if He were not a mere man. He mingles neither with the great men, who could mould an educated opinion, nor with men of gentle blood, who could give their tone to society. He passes thirty years as a workman in a carpenter's shop. He lives in mental solitude and social obscurity. Then he comes forth with a bearing towards God and men emphatically and peculiarly His own; with a piety unique in its character; and with a self-assumed authority to teach doctrines unknown to the world before. And His coming forth is not to foment a political revolution, nor to found a local theological school, but to proclaim a world-wide kingdom of souls, based upon the culture of a common moral character and an intellectual submission to a common creed about God. Presently He Himself passes away; but the kingdom of souls becomes a *fact;* and every generation is becoming a deeper, broader, more powerful fact. Indeed, it now were as easy to twist all the beams of light out of the sky as to get Jesus Christ out of the world.

14. The sum of the argument is this: A Being is among us; a better nature, a purer heart, out of some purer and better world than this we live upon. Do you require of us an exposition of His person? We are not careful to attempt the task. Enough to know that He is not of us; some strange Being, out of our

nature and above it, whose name is "the Wonderful." Enough that sin never touched His hallowed nature, and yet that He is no ascetic or unapproachable Being; but a Friend to the friendless, Strength to the weak, and a Father to the fatherless; a Being, indeed, who in Himself is all that we can understand of "The Mighty God." Enough that in Him, purity has come into the world with a power to purify; goodness to make good; righteousness to righten; beauty to beautify; love to make lovable; mercy to save: and that a "Voice" from the Invisible Light, confirmatory of His claims, says, "This is my beloved Son." Yes, quite enough. We believe; we adore; for *It* and *He* are One. There is no other solution of the mightiest of historical mysteries.

"JESUS! there is no dearer name than Thine
Which Time has blazon'd on his mighty scroll;
No wreaths, no garlands ever did entwine
So fair a temple of so vast a Soul.
There every Virtue set his triumph-seal;
Wisdom conjoin'd with Strength and radiant Grace
In a sweet copy, Heaven to reveal,
And stamp Perfection on a mortal face.
Once on the earth wert Thou, before men's eyes,
That did not half Thy beauteous brightness see;
E'en as the emmet does not read the skies,
Nor our weak orbs look through immensity;—
Once on the earth wert Thou, a living shrine,
Wherein conjoining dwelt, the Good, the Lovely, the Divine."

15. In conclusion, *Why was Jesus manifested?* The work this "beloved Son" was to accomplish must have been of a kind which common man is unable to do. Some strong necessity must have been laid upon the heart of God for the projection into the world of the Second Adam. Now let it be considered:—1. That when God planted the heart of man, *the first and deepest thing He planted there was Goodness;* that faculty which waits no commands of duty or self-interest, but goes forth towards its object, because its own, in nature, by right; and 2. That *it is this faculty which creates the sunshine of being;* which gives true dignity and blessedness to man, which everywhere is the great mediating principle, which "renews the spirit of the mind" and begets to "newness of life." History and our own experiences, do they prove it true that God has given to the human heart a drop from His own ocean of Goodness, and that it is this Goodness is the elevating, renewing, cleansing, and hallowing element of life? If they do, then it is very apparent why Jesus was manifested. *It was to "put away sin" by regenerating in the fallen, depraved human heart a love of Goodness; this regenerating to be accomplished "by the sacrifice of Himself."* To dethrone Sin, in its forms of self-getting, self-seeking, and self-keeping, the

human soul must see Goodness incarnated,—see its radiant countenance, feel its warm breath, and listen to the thrilling music of its lips. In Jesus, and in Jesus alone, is Goodness incarnated. The fragrance of all virtues stream from His robe: and in Him evidently is "the beauty of the Lord our God." He is the "Truth;" for "it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." Because He is the Truth, therefore He is the "Way:" for it is as the eye of the human heart looks at Him is felt what Sin is, what Goodness is, what Justice is, what Mercy is. And because He is the Truth and Way, therefore He is the "Life:" for "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord." Heart alone can touch heart. No power can change the heart but heart. Jesus is the throbbing heart of the Invisible God, "the Father." Therefore the one and only true Creed for man, any man, universal man, is the "Beloved Son:" *He* alone, alone *It;* nothing more, nothing less.

V.

THE FATHER'S "WELL-DONE."

"In whom I am well pleased."—MATT. xvii. 5.

1. PRESUMING that Jesus and His disciples would go by the ordinary route from Cæsarea Philippi to the second summit of Hermon, they would leave behind them beautiful temples dedicated to the worship of Pan,—god of shepherds and inventor of the flute. His image was a monster with two small horns on his head, a ruddy countenance, a flat nose, and legs, thighs, tail, and feet of a goat. Continuing up the valley of the Jordan, they would pass a projecting peak of the Hermon range, on which there was to be seen a group of temples, simple in form and rude in style. At that time upwards of a thousand years old, they had formed some of those "high places" of which we read in the Old Testament Scriptures, consecrated by Syrians or Phœnicians to the worship of Baalim. Crossing a picturesque but wild country, ridges sprinkled with oaks and glens dotted with olives, with the bleak side of Hermon on the

right, they would come to the great fountain-source of the river. It is just possible they would go up to Hibbariyeh, to the sublime ravine now called Wady Shibá, which opens a side of the mount. Directly fronting the great chasm, looking up the mighty gorge as if to catch the first beams of the morning rising over Hermon, there stood in all its glory and beauty a temple dedicated to the Sun. Three of its walls yet stand, and several of its Ionic pilasters. At its west end was the altar in the temple proper or chancel. Right away to the opposite corner of the mountain range, at Rickhleh, is another such temple. In it is still to be found a huge medallion; the colossal face of an image handsomely carved in bold relief. The length of the face is 3 ft. 4 in. It has been purposely disfigured, but the features are yet distinct and striking. It is inclosed in a double circular wreath; and is the image of old Baal himself. In the time of our Lord it was doubtless perfect; and its fellow was to be found in every temple that adorned the gorges and pinnacles of this Mount. Jesus looked on them; His disciples too, as He led them round the Mount in search of a "solitary place."

2. Up the very glens they went, on the very spires they gazed at, and over which they mounted, the Druzes, a heretical Mohammedan sect, have built

their Khulwât, that is, solitary sanctuaries. Absolute privacy in worship is what they aim at. It was what Jesus was seeking in the same sublime, wild mountain heights and glens. Was it on the second summit of Hermon that Jesus found the solitude He was seeking? Then, here among these ruins, within this circular stone wall, now as then, all thrown down; here on the very brow among these heaps of hewn stones, where in the long ages back stood an altar, on which burned sacred fire in honour of Baal-Hermon; here He and they kindled a fire of the dry prickly shrubs that ever grew around this holy peak: and here they worshipped; alone, the Solitary God; and long, long after the fitful fire-flames had died out. It was down upon this peak, into the charmed circle, unto the very broken-down altar of the old Sun-god of the nations, —on every side surrounded with temples to Baal, Pan, Jove, Jehovah,—there came, long before the morning haze rose over the Eastern horizon, "the Cloud,"—the fiery cloud of light,—from out of which came the saying of the Voice, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased, hear Him." "Hear Him;" not the priests of Jehovah's temple or synagogues, still less the priests of Phœnician Baal, Greek Pan, or Roman Jupiter: "hear Him," the more than priest or prophet, the Son, the Beloved Son of the

One, Only, Eternal Father of the spirits of all flesh. Strange! that Jesus should have selected such a spot for the outpouring of His soul to the Father: strange! that the Father should have manifested Himself in the midst of a mountain region peculiarly consecrated to idolatrous worship. Was there no significance in the selection of the *place* of the Transfiguration scene? Perhaps we may come to understand it better when the last clause of the utterance of the Voice is considered. For the present we confine ourselves to a discussion of this question—

WHY WAS GOD WELL-PLEASED WITH HIS SON JESUS?

3. It is a very deep and precious truth that *the Son of God had a human and progressive life.** Gently and gradually He woke to the consciousness of life, and its manifold meaning; to His own life very specially. Not intuitively, as from the cradle for evermore, but growingly He found Himself in possession of a Self; of a very special Self. Not at once, in childhood and from childhood for evermore, but one by one, He came to understand His relationship; the Son, the Brother, the Christ, the Priest, the Saviour. There were things He learned at twelve years of age. At twenty other things which He knew not at twelve.

* See a fine sermon by Robertson on Luke ii. 40.

And there were things revealed to Him by the Father at thirty, of which He was all unconscious at twenty. In eternal truths, in divine principles, His knowledge was absolute, ever His own, instinctive: but in matters modified by person, time, will, space, He would seem to have been dependent upon experience, or momentary and direct revelation from the Father. Hence we read of His feeling the force of temptations, of griefs, of disappointments, of surprisals, and of momentary hesitations that find their parallels in our own human life. Indeed, it is because we thus have Jesus as our Brother, He becomes to us a Saviour. He *became* perfect through temptations and sufferings; is therefore able to minister to us.

4. Now it is in this true human and progressive life of Jesus we find a solution of the Father's pleasure in Him. Twice was utterance given to this pleasure. 1. *At His Baptism.* Multitudes had come to John, and washed in Jordan, saying, "We forswear our past; it is bad: a new morrow begins from now: God forgive; God help." But Jesus came not; for He "knew no sin." During eighteen years the dream of His soul, begotten of the Father on that first visit as a boy to the holy temple, had deepened, brightened, matured; for the interpretation of the dream was of Him who gave the dream, and with Whom those

years He had held solitary and intimate communion. Now, however, He too will be baptized; for is not His hour of showing unto Israel come? Purity has grown into passion; virtue into enthusiasm. While He had mused the fire burned, and at last He said, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me; I delight to do thy will, O my God." And at the moment of His baptism,—a baptism not indeed "unto repentance," but certainly unto a "regeneration," *—there settled on His head a Dove, in which the Baptist saw a visible sign of Him who is the Spirit; and a Voice was heard acknowledging His Beloved Son and expressing His pleasure in Him. Pleasure at what?—at what but the union of the Son's will with the Father's? *His* will had come to Him as a mighty, deepening impulse to leave obscurity and retirement, and enter on a public ministry, in which to honour, declare, and expound the Father should be His only rest and comfort: now He brings His own will into full harmony with the Father's; and the Voice declares Him "well-pleased." The Father had devoted the Son to this ministry before. He had sent Him into the world for it. It only remained that this devotion should become by the Son's own act, *self-devotion.* In baptism He expressed that act

* See Matt. xix. 28.

of His own will. It was the secret, solitary resolve to do the Father's work among men, to do it unflinchingly, to do it fully; and it pleased the Father.

5. The other utterance of the Father's "Well-done" was *at the Transfiguration on Mount Hermon.* There is a perceptible difference between the tone of the earlier and latter ministry of Jesus. For a while, after His baptism, all was sunniness,—bright, full of hope, signalised by success and triumph. But slowly there comes a change over the spirit of His life. A lofty sadness characterises Him, as the revelation of His cross and passion becomes more and more distinct. The feeling is borne in upon us, as we read the story of His third year's ministry, that He is entering a cloud-land, where all is shadowy, nothing distinct. Seemingly it was because His soul was struggling with mystery, doubt, and death—"My soul is troubled; and what shall I say?"—that He climbed the heights of Hermon. There, in the solitude and silence, He prayed out to the Father, the thought, the trembling, the hesitancy, the wish of His soul. And it was not until after a long interview with the Father's messengers, Moses and Elias, who "spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem;" not until He could say "I sanctify myself;" that there came the Voice from the excellent glory,

"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." At His baptism He devoted Himself to *Life;* on Hermon to *Death.* In Jordan He was baptized unto *Work;* on the Mount He was anointed unto *Suffering.* His prayer on Hermon was the earlier utterance of what His Gethsemane prayer was the finish: for He did not leave Hermon with alacrity and joy as an overmastering sufferer. The presentiment of death was cold, gloomy; and day by day it grew gloomier, colder. On Hermon He said "Father, I will;" and the Father made answer "I am well-pleased." In Gethsemane He said "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak;" and there came an angel and "strengthened Him." *It was the self-consecration of the Son pleased the Father.*

6. It will not be out of place here to pause a moment to inquire if the idea of future reward or punishment entered into the mind of Jesus on this occasion? whether what is called the "religious motive" influenced Him? I think not: there is nothing in the narrative to suggest such a conclusion. *Personal trueness to the mind of God as revealed to Him:*—this was the spring of all His actions; and not a regard to rewards and punishments, which resolves "all virtue and piety into a principle of self-love." Some who hear me may perhaps remember

that Locke in his *Essay* says, "If a Christian who has the view of happiness and misery in another life be asked why a man must keep his word, he will give as a reason, Because God, who has the power of eternal life and death, requires it of us. If one of the old Pagan philosophers had been asked, he would have answered, Because it was dishonest, below the dignity of man, and opposite to virtue, the highest perfection of human nature, to do otherwise." Resolve this same question in the light of Jesus Christ, and will the answer be either of these suggested by Locke? Does not Jesus Christ reveal something other than prudence, intuition, or utility as the foundation of morality? Will a life built on such a foundation commend itself to God? Will it even to any one of us who is a father?

7. In this exposition of the source of the Father's joy in Christ Jesus there are three lessons which the Divine Spirit would have us learn.

First, THE TRUE NOTION OF SACRIFICE WHICH IS ACCEPTABLE UNTO GOD. There comes a cry groaning out of the great heart of humanity,—What is the acceptable sacrifice? Streaming altars and strange divinations, children for Moloch and cakes for the Queen of heaven, are the responses from classic and pagan times. Hindoo immolations, African fetish-

ism, and the atrocities of savage cannibalism, are the answers from the uninstructed consciences of modern heathen. Rubrical exactitude and ascetical self-denial are the replies of certain sections of the Christian Church. These all are wide of the truth, "as the truth is in Jesus." It is not mere death; not suffering, pain, or blood which pleases God. "The blood of Christ was sanctified by the will with which He shed it. It was that which gives it value." He said truly who said that. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of he-goats: Bring no more vain oblations: Your hands are full of blood: Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well." The entire surrender to the will of God is that alone which imparts to sacrifice a significance. "I come to do Thy will;" that is the sacrifice which is acceptable to God. Because Christ Jesus—

> "—— proved them all,—the doubt, the strife,
> The faint perplexing dread,—
> The mists that hang o'er parting life,"——

and yet through all, and in all, the one throb of His soul, deeper, more vehement than all other throbs, was "Thy will, not mine," therefore—

"—— there was sent Him from on high
A gift of strength for man to die;"

and in death to become the world's Atonement. He, in whose heart was the content to *be* and to *do* that which was revealed to His conscience,—*His* sacrifice alone could be a sacrifice all-sufficient in the Father's sight as the proper sacrifice of humanity. All this imparts a new beauty and meaning to texts which speak of the *love* of Jesus Christ, and of the *virtue* and *merit* of His death. Also we come to understand how He, who "through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself to God," can quicken us, persuade us, constrain us, *enable* us to present our bodies a living sacrifice unto God for the world's sake, for our brother's sake, above all for Christ's sake. "For *the love of Christ* constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then all died; and that He died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again."

8. The second lesson we are to learn is this, FILIAL OBEDIENCE IS OUR PROPER BEARING TOWARDS GOD. Obedience is the fat of the offering; not a constrained obedience, but such a full, true, and ready obedience as the loving child yields to his parent. It is love to his parent not wages from his parent, is the ground

of his obedience. It is true, the obedience that is acceptable to God must have in it a child's *faith.* The branch abiding in the vine must adjust itself to the circumstances, times, and seasons of the vine. It must put forth buds, blossoms, and leaves in the spring; delicious ripe fruit in the time of gathering; and it must drop its leaves and be content to be a naked, bare, do-nothing branch in the winter. But obedience must also have in it a child's *love.* He is a true musician, who not merely plays correctly or long, but whose soul is in the music. Nothing can be love to God which does not shape itself into obedience; and nothing can be acceptable obedience which is not fragrant with affection. God would not have men His abject slaves; mere servants; crawling miserable sinners. He would have us men-children; child-disciples. In His "beloved Son" at Jordan and Hermon we are to see what He would have us be: and what is that? It is to be a learner; a devout recipient of His revelations; a listener with open ears; a faithful witness in our own very self to the mind and life of the Father: it is to trust our own soul, that through *it* God speaks to us directly; to go alone; to dare love God without veil. At every new turn in the road of life, in every new change in circumstance and position, under every new providence, upon every

coming to us of a new revelation of the mind and will of God,—to say, although with a trembling voice and heart choked with fear, "My Father, I am willing to be baptized unto work; weary, thankless, unceasing work: I am willing to be anointed unto suffering; personal, mental, or vicarious suffering;"—*that* is to follow Jesus; *that* is to be a child; *that* is to be a Son of God; *that* is the proper bearing of a man before the Father. And as the leaf that trembles in the wind assimilates the light of heaven to make its colour, and the sap of the parent stem the innumerable influences of heaven, earth, and air, to make up the flower's beautiful being; so this filial obedience, though often a trembling, weakly thing, shall assimilate the truth, purity, and goodness of God to itself, and makes us "as He is."

9. It yet remains for us to consider the third lesson; —SUFFERING MAKES THINGS MUSICAL. There is as much meaning as beauty in a fable with which perhaps most are familiar. "We were dull lumps of silver and copper ore in the mines," said the harp-strings, "and no silence on the living sunny earth is like the blank of the voiceless ages in those dead and sunless depths. But since then we have passed through many fires. The hidden earth-fires underneath the mountains first moulded us to ore: and

then in these last years human hands have finished the training which makes us what we are. We have been smelted in furnaces till all our dross was gone; and then we were drawn out on the rack, and hammered, and fused; and at last stretched on these wooden frames, and drawn tighter and tighter until we wondered at ourselves and at the gentle hand which strikes such rich and sweet chords and melodies from us;—from us who once were silent lumps in silent mines. Fires and blows have done it for us. Suffering has made us musical." Jesus the Christ was made "perfect through sufferings." Out of temptation struggled against and overcome; out of that very self-humility which shrunk from publicity and went to John at Jordan, alone, in a solitary time, struggled against and overcome; out of that weakness, doubt, and hesitancy struggled against in the midnight darkness and silence of Hermon, and overcome; out of the dread and horror of dying the death of shame struggled against in Gethsemane, and overcome; came the grand and sacred harmonies of truest life,—hope and peace, strength and joy: for it was in these efforts to overcome, in these struggles of His soul to be true and beautiful, that there came the saying of the voice, "My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

10. There is divine music in our homes, when parents and brothers and sisters, struggling against and overcoming self-ease, carry each other's burdens. There is divine music in the house, when a woman subdues material suffering and overcomes the lower forms of disappointment, for affection sake. There is divine music heard in the land, when men are found trying to lift on their shoulders in the name of God and His Christ burdens of trouble and labours, for the sake of their country. There is divine music heard in the Church, when "the called of God" follow His Son up into the mountain in the midnight hour and gloom. For as the Father in heaven observes the capacity of faith and love in every physical and mental suffering, a throb of gladness fills His soul: and in the very midst of the darkness and solitude He comes to the sufferer in a cloud of light, and in a still small voice says "I am well-pleased;" and the sufferer's heart is comforted, his spirit is strengthened, and he too has music in his soul. As a last word, let this be remembered, "A man's virtue is not to be measured by his great attempts, but by his common actions."

NOTE.

THE WORD "REGENERATION."

1. Twice only does *Regeneration*, as the rendering of παλιγγενεσια, occur in the New Testament. In the first instance it is Jesus Christ uses the word: "Ye, who have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory, shall also sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. xix. 28). In the other instance it is St Paul uses the word: "He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus iii. 5). In either case, is the idea that personal and radical change of nature which popular usage assigns to the word? Rather, did not our Lord refer to that evolution of new life which He was in His own proper person planting in the world?—"the commencing reformation," as Calvin has it? Paraphrasing the passage in Matthew, we should put it thus: "When the Son of Man shall be manifested to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead,—when He whom men will kill shall ascend up where He was before, then you, who have followed me, whose hearts have drunk in of my spirit, whose minds have laid hold of my words with simplicity and faith, who indeed have grown to me as branches grafted on to an olive-tree,—you too shall attain unto honour, dignity, and glory by the office and ministry you shall then be called to sustain." As used by the apostle, "regeneration" would seem to be the first step to the attainment of a "saved" life, that is, the pure, strong, beautiful life of sonship with God,—a coming into that life by a preparatory washing from past thoughts, desires, and habits through the appearance of "the kindness and love of God our Saviour."

2. There is a distinction between Regeneration and Conversion. The Spirit causes the soul of a man to be loosed from his old ideas and inclinations, by implanting in his mind some new principle, or in his heart some new attraction; this is *Regeneration.* The soul itself, acting under the guidance of this new principle, or reaching out in endeavour after this holy, beautiful, true, and better thing in Christ Jesus; this is *Conversion.*

VI.

THE SAYINGS OF JESUS.

"Hear Him."—MATT. xvii. 5.

1. "SPEECH is reason's brother:" hearing is the mother of wisdom. "Speech is the child of thought:" hearing is the gatherer of the harvest of knowledge. To speak is a silver gift: to hear a golden. "Conversation is the music of the mind; an intellectual orchestra." To talk well is a royal power. *Jesus was emphatically a talker.* Did it ever occur to any man to measure the influence He exercised upon the world by His *talk?* If our year's talk, with all its littlenesses, exaggerations, over-colourings, pettinesses, and with all its true, loving, golden bits, were written in a book,—how would it read? who indeed would be found to read it? what might be its true value? Yet from day to day, and month to month, our words are flying in every direction, producing effects on those who hear them; effects deep and lasting! Contrast *our* talk,—the talk of the wisest and best of

the world's ages,—with the talk of Jesus of Nazareth, —talk seldom set, scholastic, or didactic, but commonly the outcome of the moment, of the circumstance, passing, conversational,—and in the contrast have we not an argument in favour of His more than human inspiration? have we not strong evidence in favour of the truthfulness of Matthew when he says the Voice from out of the cloud bade the disciples "Hear Him?"

2. *Whom? Who is the Speaker?* Even at risk of repetition, the external conditions of Jesus Christ must be deliberately brought before the mind. He comes before us, as He came to the disciples, without pomp or supporters; with parents, relatives, associates, all poor and of the unlearned class; with no dash or subtle plan of ambition. Yet a something in His bearing, a spirit that looked out of His eyes, a deep sweet earnestness in the tones of His voice, a child-like simplicity of purpose, and a consuming enthusiasm of humanity,—all this attracted and fascinated men. And as they clustered round Him, whether in synagogue, or on mountain-side, in the bazaar or village gate, He *talked:* and His words sounded like the musical pulses of the morning on the great harp of Memnon. He spoke of heavenly morals in terms so simple, so saintly, so beautiful, that the vilest heart

felt the charm of virtue, the dullest nature was awed, and the most ignorant wondered at his own intelligence. His *soul* spoke to men; and under the spell of it they were convinced of "sin and righteousness and judgment to come;" and as many as received His words felt themselves uplifted and ushered into a better, truer, purer, happier way of life. Did the doctors of the law and teachers of the people marvel and ask, "Whence hath this Man this doctrine?" He told them, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me. If any man will do His will, He shall know of the doctrine." The germs of all His sayings were indeed the dry seeds that they had brought from the barren crags of Horeb. For thirty years He had fostered them in His soul, by meditation, prayer, and communion with the Father. Therefore He was able to *talk.*

3. In order that we may understand something of what is involved in hearing Jesus rather than the masters and teachers of the age in which He lived, let us consider first—

THE SECTS AND PARTIES OF THE JEWS.

By far the largest party or school was that of the *Pharisees*, or "separated ones." Allusion is made to them in the Maccabean psalms, where they are

called "godly ones," "saints" (Ps. lxxix. 2; xcvii. 10; cxxxii. 9). 1. A fundamental principle with them, and which is common to modern orthodox Jews, was *oral tradition.* They held that by the side of the written law, there was an *oral* law to complete and explain it. In the Mishna, a collection or digest of traditions and explanations of Scripture, it is said: "Moses received the *oral* law from Sinai and delivered it to Joshua, Joshua delivered it to the elders, the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the men of the Great Synagogue." The words of the Fathers, therefore, are of equal authority with the writings of Moses. But in no one instance did Jesus appeal to tradition for support. His final authority was Moses, the psalms, the prophets. "They testify of Me." They were His only Bible. "It is written" was the "sword of the Spirit" with which He combated alike the devil and men. And "Hear *Him*" was the command of the Voice that spake from the cloud. 2. *Pharisaism was Ritualism.* Religion was made to consist of a great number of ritual observances. These were devoid of moral sense; were puerile and superstitious. The very first decision in the Mishna is on the Shema: "Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord." It was a tradition that Deut. vi. 7 meant every Jew was to recite the

passage twice in the twenty-four hours. The question discussed is, How late may a Jew put off the evening recitation and yet not break the law? Rabbi Eliezer says that wise men said, "Up to midnight;" but Rabbi Gamaliel says, "Up till the column of the dawn has risen." Concerning the Sabbath, not Moses, but the Fathers, ordered every Jew to light a candle on the eve of the Sabbath; and a question which the Pharisees hotly discussed was, With what sort of wick and oil are candles for the Sabbath to be lighted, and with what *not* to be lighted? In a treatise on the festivals, the first point considered is called the Case of the Egg: and we are gravely informed that "an egg laid on a feast day may be eaten, according to the school of Rabbi Shammai, but the school of Rabbi Hillel says not." Could anything be more ritualistic and petty, or betray less spirituality? In opposition to it all Jesus said, "God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth;" "hear and understand, not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man;" "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies, these defile a man." And the Voice from the excellent glory said, "Hear *Him*." We remark—3. *Pharisaism ignored universal principles.*

To give one example:—In Lev. xix. 18 it is written, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Pharisaism limits "neighbour" to a good Pharisee; and the Mishna prohibits any Jewish midwife assisting a heathen mother in the hour which universally commands sympathy. In this, and other cases mentioned in the New Testament which we have avoided repeating, there is a fatal, blind, and most strange ignoring of principles, which if true, good, and beautiful at all, must be so all the world over, and in all ages. "Ye have made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition," said Jesus: and He tells the stories of the Two Debtors, of the Pharisee and Publican in the temple, and of the poor fellow on the road to Jericho. And the Voice of the Father falls on the ears of men who are learners, who want to know truth, to *do* truth, to *be* truth, and it says, "Hear *Him.*"

4. *The Sadducees or Zadokites* formed a second school or party among the Jews in the time of Jesus. 1. Their distinguishing feature was a *denial of any resurrection or spirit life.* Because Moses did not, in any single instance, call to his aid the consolations of hereafter rewards or the terrors of hereafter punishments; and because there is an absence in his writings of any distinct assertion of the im-

mortality of the soul, or of a resurrection after death, the Sadducees said, "We shall not live again: this life is all: or, if indeed there is another life, this has nothing to do with that." In contradiction to their doctrine, "Hear *Him*," said the Voice that spoke on Hermon. And they heard Jesus appeal to Exod. iii. 14, 15, where God, speaking to Moses, calls Himself, first "*The I* AM," and then "*The Lord God of your fathers*,"—of fathers whose bodies had been in the grave for centuries; and He said "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Ye therefore do greatly err, for all live unto Him." And He further told them the parables of the Sheep and Goats, and the Rich Man and Lazarus. 2. Perhaps Fletcher's lines—

> "Man is his own star; and the soul that can
> Render an honest and a perfect man,
> Commands all light, influence, and fate;
> Nothing to him falls early, or too late.
> . . . . . .
> Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
> Our fatal shadows that walk by us still:"—

may be regarded as a correct exponent of the Sadducean creed. Taken as the *all* of man's creed, in opposition to it the disciples heard Jesus say, "I do always those things which please the Father. Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee: take away this cup: nevertheless, not what I will but what Thou

wilt." He pointed too to the flowers that God paints, the grass He beautifies, the ravens He feeds, and the sparrows He counts, and said, "You are of more value than these: how much more shall God give to you, think of you, clothe you, beautify you! Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life." And from the cloud that rested on the mount came the Father's "Amen; Hear Him." Sadduceeism was merely worldliness coloured by the national theism and circumstances. Jesus stood in direct antagonism to it: "Ye cannot serve God *and* Mammon: If thy hand or foot cause thee to offend, cut it off and cast it from thee; it is better to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire." And man's instincts, aspirations, affections, moral sense, all are ranged on the side of Jesus.

5. Scarcely to be called a sect, there was a third party among the Jews called *Essenes or Puritans.* They were distinguished rather by an aspiration after ideal purity than any special code of doctrines. They liked to dwell apart; observed the Sabbath with singular strictness; avoided the business of life; held "meat and drink" to be unworthy of the light; and looked upon the body as the mere prison of the soul.

Many of them were celibates, and gave themselves up to a dreamy study of the law and prophets, for there is a *hidden* meaning, they said. But Jesus came among men as no Puritan. Essenism had not His sympathy. His "showing unto Israel" was at a marriage-feast. To add to the gladness of the occasion, He turned water into wine. The majority of His miracles had for their object the restoration or perfecting of the body. The marred frame of the deaf and dumb extorts His sigh, and pale, ghastly death His tears. He tells the parable of the Talents, and says, "Freely ye have received, freely give." He gives a picture of the judgment; and what is the lesson of it but this?

> "Go, clothe the naked, lead the blind,
> Give to the weary rest;
> For sorrow's children comfort find,
> And help for the distress'd.
>
> Hast thou no gold? Give sympathy;
> Its power none can know:
> A loving word, a gentle smile,
> May heal a heart of woe."

For eighteen years He laboured with His own hands. His chosen disciples were fishermen; nor was their work of life discarded by their call. And if He said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross," He also said, "Let your

light so shine before men that they may see your *good works*"—not pietism, not asceticism. And the Voice said "Hear *Him.*"

6. The human body is the most symmetrical, grand, and good of created things. Labour is a blessing from the Lord, not a curse. It was Eden-born. True worship is the ennobling and purifying both labour and the body, by making them minister to the comfort, joy, and good of others; who therefore bless God because of us. An unsound, neglected body must tell upon the soul: as an idle mind or uncultured soul strengthens the lower animal nature. Body and soul are so connected, that, in this life at least, we truly worship the Father in proportion as they are co-workers. Therefore the doctrine of Jesus, oppositely to that of the Essenes, is,—Where you are,—what,—who,—be true to yourself and have faith in God: that is the worship the Father desiderates. Evidently Jesus held the idea that religion,—divine worship,—is not acceptance of a creed, or mere feeling, or inward experience; but a vigorous, practical obedience, however circumstanced, to the one law of God—*vicarious sacrifice.* And the Voice said "Hear Him."

7. Let us now give a brief consideration to the relation in which the doctrines of Jesus stood to

THE LEADING PHILOSOPHIES OF THE GENTILES.

In the age of Jesus the cultured mind of the Gentile world was consecrated either to the Platonic or the Stoic school. 1. *Stoicism* was favoured by the Romans; and at the founding of Christianity, and for two centuries later, it exerted no inconsiderable influence on the large nationalities which they had first conquered and then consolidated. Between God and matter the Stoics recognised no essential distinction. Their highest conception of difference was expressed when they said, God is the informing principle of matter. They therefore believed in absolute fate. "Human and divine things alike are carried along in an irrevocable course." *Piety* was little else than a surrender to this irresistible fate; and *self-devotion* to what is fated, as a cold calculation and an act of homage to reason, was the highest form of piety. Hence the virtuous Stoic was proudly strong; superior to pleasure and pain; would relieve the afflicted, and protect himself against personal injury, but repress all pity for others and all sorrow on his own account. The consciousness of well-doing was reward enough.* Wonderfully grand and pure, the system of the Stoics was well

* "Voluptas non est merces nec causa virtutis sed accessio; nec quid delectat placet sed quid placet delectat."—*Seneca.*

suited to the conquerors of the world. 2. The Greeks and scattered Jews, however, gave more favour to the doctrines of Socrates and Plato. This school undoubtedly recognised and adored a supreme God, the Almighty Creator and Ruler. He was taught as "He who arranges and upholds the universe; who is the fountain of all that is beautiful and good." The pre-existence of human souls, and their possible occupation of other bodies after death, and as a punishment for vice the occupation of the bodies of irrational creatures,—this was maintained by Socrates: as also both by him and Plato was the conviction that a wise and good man ought to worship the gods recognised by the country which he inhabits. Plato distinguishes four cardinal virtues — temperance, courage, justice, reason. To practise these was to be wise and good, to resemble God. But Plato's God was no living, near, sympathising, loving being: He was rather a sublime *Idea;* at most, a being who entered into no personal communication with the individual man. Plato does indeed sometimes speak of God as *we* speak, but it is with a very different signification attaching to his words. For example, he says, "Virtue is the gift of God in those who possess it:" but he does not mean a gift bestowed by the near and sympathising God in answer to the throb and

prayer of a man's soul; only the gift of God to a man, as ductility, hardness, or brightness is the gift of God to a piece of gold.

8. Now in contrast to Stoicism and Platonism place the untabulated teachings, the conversational talk of Jesus of Nazareth. "One is your Father, He who is in heaven: if you, being evil, know how to give *good* things to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give good things to them that ask Him: Have faith in God; He loveth you." "When you pray, say, Our Father, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us: whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister; and whosoever will be the chiefest shall be servant of all." "Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father: not one is forgotten before God: Fear not therefore; you are of more value (to God and His world) than many sparrows." He is wandering among the hills and glens of Batanea, east of the Jordan, and sees a shepherd seeking a lost sheep, and He converts it into a parable of the "kingdom of heaven:" in the cities and villages He meets many a Jew who has forsaken alike the land and God of his fathers, and out of the fact He weaves for them and the whole world the inimitable story of the Prodigal Son. These doctrines are wondrously adapted to the doubting, sorrow-

ing, hungering heart of humanity. When, therefore, the disciples made known abroad the Lord Jesus, man was found prepared to hear Him and believe in Him rather than Zeno or Seneca, Socrates or Plato, however grand and imperishable some of their utterances. They were philosophers: *He* was a "quickening Spirit."

9. We bring this discourse to a close by asking your consideration of what is involved in hearing Jesus on the

DOCTRINE OF SACRIFICE COMMON BOTH TO JEWS AND GENTILES.

Necessarily our remarks must be very brief; therefore suggestive rather than expository. Not only the "common people," alike Jew and Gentile, but also the cultured and exalted offered sacrifices in the time of Jesus; although those who arrogated to themselves the name of philosophers were careful to intimate they waited at the altars less from personal faith than public good. Often the sacrifices were looked upon as gifts or tribute; an idea which runs through much of the Greek literature. Often they were a forfeiture, assuming the character of prayer, sometimes supplicatory, at other times deprecatory. Often they were regarded as thank-offerings;

and feasting on the flesh of the victims was a partaking of "the table of the gods." But the idea most prevalent was that *sacrifices were vicarious and placating:* —God has been wronged, therefore is angered; His law has been broken, therefore He will punish; He has been neglected, therefore will forsake: but this bullock shall appease Him, this kid shall placate Him, this lamb shall be an atonement; they shall die, and the law-breaker and law-maker be at one again. Now what had Jesus to say in relation to this strange mixture of truth and error? what did He teach, that affected the doctrine and practice of sacrifice current in the world of His day?

10. First, Jesus taught that there is *something greater than Law,—there is Mercy.* A woman who had desecrated her womanhood and broken the holy law of God is brought to Him. "By the law she should die," say her accusers, "but what sayest Thou?" With a face burning for very shame of those dark, false, tortuous spirits who ask Him, He says "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her;" and "He stooped down and scrabbled on the ground." Had *that* no meaning? Surely: for presently to the sinning woman He becomes as God;—"Hath no man condemned thee? Neither do I: go, and sin no more:"—If man because he is

guilty before God *cannot* condemn, God because He is holy *will not;* law was made for man: God is above law; *God is mercy;* He writes the sinner's sins in the dust, which the breath of His loving-kindness obliterates. It was an emphatic reiteration of the word by Hosea, "I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings;" and of the word by Micah, "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what the Lord doth require of thee; to do justly, and to love mercy, and to humble thyself to walk with God." Law and mercy are not opposite principles in God. There is the same love in law as in mercy; the difference is only in expression, where mercy has the advantage in intensity and expediency; as when I say to one, "Thou shalt not jump overboard," and when, on his disobedience, I follow to save him. In law, love directs, warns, and helps; in mercy, love purifies, redeems, and saves. Secondly, Jesus taught that there is *something greater than Justice,—there is Forgiveness.* He told Peter a beautiful story about the Heavenly Father in reply to his question, "How oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? till seven times?" The story is familiar to all; but let us read it:—"A certain king would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was

brought unto him that owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt," &c. (Matt. xviii. 23–35.) That also was a grand exposition of God's moral government, which Jesus gave to Simon the Pharisee :—"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors : the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged" (Luke vii. 36–50). In neither of these cases are we taught that God *must* because of the immutable holiness of His nature punish sin ; nor is it at all apparent that Jesus conceived the *obligation* to punishment to be an ultimate fact of moral consciousness ; and the doctrine of satisfaction to divine justice is not so much as hinted. Oppositely, justice is set aside, punishment is withheld, and Love freely, fully, forgives ; and therefore

Love is loved. "God is love." Love is God's OUGHT; not Justice. All virtue is comprehended in love. Justice is one mode of God's love, prompting to punish in order to reform, renew, save the sinner. Forgiveness is another and more effectual mode of God's love. "He stayeth His rough wind in the day of the east-wind: by this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged." The rough, biting wind that shakes the mountain pine to its very roots, half tearing it up, saves it from a fruitless, miserable death in the hard, frozen ground: but the sunshine and dew give vitality, beauty, and fragrance to the frail flower.

11. These two truths were emphasised and illustrated by Jesus when He taught; "This is eternal life, that men should know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent." *Who is the only true God?* Jesus says, "God is the tender, patient, saddened, wronged, self-sacrificing parent, who for a while forgets His law and restrains His indignant justice; who is on the look-out for His prodigal, and whose return He hails with joy, for evermore forgetting condemnation and wrath: he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." *And what is Jesus Christ?* He says, "I am the good Shepherd who am come over the mountains seeking to save, and I lay down my life for the sheep." He is the Sacrifice in whom the

true God approaches men. In Him God expresses no desire for appeasement, or any expediency for the conservation of His holiness. But in Jesus, and with His blood, God writes, in a way the world can read and realise, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ."

12. It was the preaching of the mighty energy of the love which produced such voluntary humiliation and self-sacrifice that overturned the blood-streaming altars of the ancients: it is the preaching of the same mighty energy of the love of God that will gradually transform all the coldness and darkness existing in the world into responsive warmth and purity.

VII.

THE FATHER'S GLORY IN CHRIST.

"He received from God the Father honour and glory in the holy mount."—2 PETER i. 17, 18.
"Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory."—JAMES ii. 1.
"We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father."—JOHN i. 14.
"The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."—2 COR. iv. 6.

1. IT is a great mystery, *the moral unity of Jesus Christ and God.* Of this unity the Transfiguration on Hermon was alike symbolic and assertive. The light of Christ's life beamed on the moral night of the forty-first century of humanity like the first rays of heaven's light on the yet shapeless world,—harbinger of its reduction to order, life, and beauty. Rays of a strange, undreamed-of glory hung about Jesus like the splendours which the sun imparts to the cloud that hides his face. Are His hands rough with labour? Yet at their touch eyes receive power to see, and the dead to live again. His voice was heard in the wail of infancy and in dying groan; yet it quelled the

roaring storm for His disciples' sake. That Mary and Martha might understand evermore that the holy dead are only hidden from mortal sight in the skirts of the Father's garment, with tear-stricken face He called back Lazarus. He did not walk the earth in imperial purple or broad phylacteries; but healing mercies came with His footsteps. His untabulated, informal utterances, here, there, anywhere,—to the many on the mountain side or in the synagogue, and to the one or the two in the house or by the well, —quickened the morally-dead to life and burned like a consuming fire into the hearts of Priests and Pharisees. This historical Jesus Christ the apostles preached, and in Him interpreted the ever invisible God.

2. Ask a little child who has learned the story of Jesus Christ's life and death from some "grandmother Lois" or "mother Eunice," what God makes to be His glory? the child will have no difficulty in telling you. It cannot be mere sovereignty, whether of might or holiness. Self-laudation or self-enrichment is not in Christ. Oppositely, if we are to see "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," then it is stooping to help the helpless and being mighty merely to bless the weak. And if so,—if *love* is God's glory; if benevolence, giving one's self up in

sacrifice, if assisting the wrong-doer to right himself, if seeking out the lost, just because he is lost and therefore miserable, if this is "the glory of God," the heart responds to it as the very kind of regality human nature wants. *This* knowledge has in it the power to purify, renew, ennoble, and gladden; it transforms the cross into an omnipotent spiritual magnet; it is the spring sunshine streaming down upon the hard, up-ploughed land.

3. But let us consider this "glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" in relation to

I.—ORIGINAL SIN.

There are some who think, and others who say, the very infant comes into the world under the curse, and exposed to the wrath, of God. Have they learned this from Jesus Christ? When was He angry with a child? Where is it recorded that He explained to mothers the awful danger to which their babes were exposed? Repeat the words in which He expounded the terrible doctrine? Oh! could you imagine Jesus meeting some glad father and fond mother, in the first freshness of parental feelings, as they pass in at "the gate of the Temple which is called Beautiful;"—less beautiful far at that moment in its sculptured marble than in the living group which is bearing the babe to

the altar, with a pair of turtle-doves, to dedicate it to the God of its fathers;—could you imagine Jesus meeting them, and telling them that the child, their own dear little thing, was under the curse and exposed to the wrath of God? Blessed be His name, He did no such thing, taught no such doctrine. Nothing He ever did, not a word He ever said, could possibly hint to the disciples or the multitude, that Jesus believed "every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth in its own nature bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal." *

4. But it is asked, *Is not original sin a truth?* We answer, Beyond all question original *sin* is a truth; but original *guilt* is a fiction. Sin and guilt are *two* things, not one thing. We are born in sin, but only *guilt* God curses. Sin God hates, yet endures: guilt He punishes, "though He bare long." Now the sin was Adam's work; but the law of inheritance is God's. Is God then the author of sin? No: it is not that God made a *sinful* nature, and ordained that man should inherit it,—badge of a curse; but it is that,

* Confession of Faith, chap. vi. sec. 6.

man having made his nature sinful, God ordains that it shall perpetuate itself. Are we then born children of wrath? No, a thousand times No! Why then does God take upon Himself the burden of man's life, seeing that because of Adam we are born in sin, and therefore easily, and as it were naturally, do wrong, go astray, follow evil? I venture to think the answer is not far to seek. Personal experience suggests it; the history of the ages confirms it; and it is the Divine meaning of the birth, childhood, and manhood of Jesus Christ:—*Only through the experiences that come out of the Fall can man become a divine man.* The child's freewill is weak; worse, it is warped: only by discipline and education, by the wilderness and want, can the child *become* a son of God (John. i. 12, 13).

5. If then we correctly interpret "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," in relation to original sin, it is *to bless, not to curse; to bless more and more, that there may be no curse by and by.* He, who was the "brightness of the Father's glory," and who said, "Whosoever hath seen Me hath seen the Father," did not go about telling men that they and their children were under the curse of the Almighty, for that Adam a hundred generations before had broken His law; but He endeavoured so to make them see the loveli-

ness of loving-kindness that they should yield God for His love's sake their best affections; He endeavoured so to make them see the beauty, wisdom, and exaltedness of His character, that they should adore God for His character's sake; He endeavoured so to make them feel the personality of His interest in, and His grace and kindness toward them, that they should be drawn nigh to God for His fatherhood's sake. This was Jesus Christ's way of purifying the heart from the original taint; this was His method of regenerating the soul that had inherited a bias to self-will and an atmosphere of sin; inherited, as a horse the paces of his sire,—paces not of original nature but of art. Are you a father? Through the father-Prophet the children come to understand the father-God. Are you a mother? That which is noblest, purest, dearest, and best is to the child the picture of the unseen God: *you* should be that picture. Heaven has allotted you a vineyard, and given you some tender plants; the plants are poor and weakly, the ground is weedy and stony. Your commission is, weed, pick out the stones, plant, dig, prune, nurture. But you must learn *how*, that you may *do;* you must *get*, that you may *give;* you must *be*, that you may *create:* only the soul that *has* can *impart;* only the soul that *is*, can *inspire.* Whose soul is an open door to "the

Lord from heaven," whose heart is filled with "the love of God which is in Christ Jesus," is qualified for motherhood, fatherhood.

6. Let us now behold "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" in relation to—

II.—ACTUAL SIN.

I hear Jesus tell the grandest story ever told. The younger son, self-willed, ignorant, ungrateful, demands his share of the patrimony, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me?" And the father gives it him. But how is this? No remonstrance, no refusal; a simple yielding to the sinner that which he asks for? What does it mean? What was the father's spirit at that moment? Any one of you that is a father, mother, or sister; when wronged, wronged bitterly, sinned against, treated as this young man treated his parent, what is your first feeling? Is it not intense indignation? And indignation the more intense the more you have loved the wrong-doer? That is your first and natural feeling; not vindictiveness, not passion, not hatred, if your love be the pure love of a father, mother, or sister; bald and hot indignation, a revolt of the soul against ingratitude, injustice, wrong, sin; a noble feeling, the opposition of the spirit to that which is unnatural and therefore bad; a feeling

begotten in you of Him who said "*Abhor* that which is evil." Further, I see Jesus in the synagogue. Before Him they have placed a man with a withered hand; and around about are Pharisees and expounders of the law, at one and the same moment rendering their Sabbath worship to God, and with evil intent watching Jesus. I see Jesus rise from His seat as by a divine impulse; I hear His foot come down firmly on the marble floor; I observe a burning in His face as "He looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." It was not vindictive wrath, but the indignant repulse of a loving soul against an uncharitable literalism, and a faith divorced from natural morals. Again I see Jesus, and it is in the Temple. Pharisees and Herodians have taken counsel how they may entangle Him in His talk. Grouping round, they ask, "Master, we know that Thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, tell us, Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar or not?" I see the eyes of Jesus brighten till they burn like flames of fire, and I hear a noble, passionate remonstrance in His voice, "Why *tempt* ye me, ye hypocrites?" It was not the cold, measured sentence of condemnation, but the deep revolt of a true, simple, luminous soul from untruth, pretentiousness, Satanism.

7. If then we are to interpret God by Jesus Christ, *intense indignation is His first feeling towards the actual sinner.* Not damning wrath, not avenging passion, not implacable anger, not an inflexible righteousness; no, no; but, if we may mirror the great in the small, the indignation of a wronged mother, the repulse of soul which a little child feels when sinned against, such a feeling as this:—Dr Spencer met a physician, one of the Christians of his congregation. He saw something was wrong with him, for his step was firm and slow, his lips set, and a strange fire burned in his eyes. "How are you to-day, Doctor?" said the minister. Waking as from a dream, he replied soberly, "I am mad." It was a new word for the mild, loving, tender-hearted Christian to use. "I am mad;" and then he went on in a deep, earnest voice, "I found a widow standing by her goods thrown into the street. She could not pay the month's rent. The landlord had turned her out. One of her children is going to die. And that landlord is a member of the Church. I am on my way to see him." As in the light of the moon you have the reflected glory of the sun, so in that man you have the Spirit of God against the sinner—*anger and grief mingled, which we call Indignation, first; and then Indignation going to see the sinner to persuade him to right himself.*

8. It is not within our present discourse to argue the correctness or incorrectness of the doctrine of Substitution, as popularly held. That there is a doctrine of Substitution in the Christian economy is beyond doubt. But we wish these two truths distinctly to be realised:—1. That God in the face of Jesus Christ recognised no such moral principle as Vindictive Justice; and 2. That nothing could be more prompt, full, and free than the forgiveness of the sinner. *Mercy;* fatherly, motherly, unbought, unsought, patient, long-suffering mercy:—*free* mercy; free, like the brook which leaps from the mountain side, and of which any thirsty pilgrim may drink, or in which any travel-stained man may wash; free, like the air which belts the earth, and penetrates with renewing grace alike the cottage and the palace; free, like the sunshine that gildeth the rough mountain with light, and painteth the lowliest flower with beauty:—*mercy* is the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ. I hear of a broken and contrite-hearted prodigal. A father's indignation let the sinner go; a father's hoping patience waited long; and now a father's forgiveness exacts no penalty, asks no surety, waits no promise, but runs forth to meet him even while he is yet so "great way off" that nothing but expectant love could have seen him:—

mercy kisses the marred face, and hushing the penitent's prayer before it is half uttered, calls for robe and ring and fatted calf. Not the *how* God comes to be able to forgive, but that *He does forgive and is waiting to be gracious*,—this was "the glory of God," that Jesus was so anxious sinners should see, and seeing believe; that believing they might be renewed in the spirit of their mind; in a word, be "born again."

> "Were not Mary's tears so humbly shed—
> Her hair—her streaming eyes—
> And the sunk heart that inly bled—
> Heaven's noblest sacrifice?
> And thou who hast slept in error's sleep,
> Oh wouldst thou wake in heaven?
> Like Mary kneel—like Mary weep—
> Love much—and be forgiven."

Yes, that is it. Let the sinner believe God "ready to forgive," and "rich in mercy:" God will conserve His own righteousness.

9. Righteous indignation is the first phase of the glory of God in relation to actual sin. Forgiving mercy is the second. There remains yet a third. We like not to think of it, yet dare not overpass it. It is the background of the picture. Patience exhausted, the word of God disregarded, long-suffering grace despised, mercy repudiated, callings unob-

served, I see Jesus standing before impenitent sinners; a far-reaching look is in His eyes, His attitude is that of disappointment and deepest anger; and I hear him utter seven "*woes*" in a voice hard and painful:—"*Woe unto you! Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. How can ye escape the damnation of hell?*"

Again, I see Jesus sitting on Olivet, overlooking the city that He loved. Its hour of mercy gone, space for repentance at an end; yet is it with streaming eyes and tremulous lips He pronounces the doom of its impenitence:—"*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*"

Now if, according to the teaching of the Apostle, the moral character and bearing of Jesus is really a picturing forth "in the flesh" of the invisible God, then there comes an hour when mercy is changed to judgment, and indignation converted into wrath; when unrequited love becomes swift to punish, and the trampled blood of the New Testament of grace and pardon by Jesus Christ becomes the "wrath of the Lamb;" when the Father, reluctantly—oh! so

reluctantly—puts His child, His hard-hearted, wilful, impenitent child, into "*the outer darkness.*" What is that,—"the outer darkness?" Oh, how I have tried to hope that in that "outer darkness" there may come penitence, faith, love! How often I have wondered whether—

"I saw an aged mother, bowed
'Mid weariness and care;
Time wrote in sorrow on her brow
And 'mid her frosty hair.
What was it that, like sunbeam clear,
O'er her wan features ran,
As pressing towards her deafened ear,
I named her sinful son?
What was it? Ask the mother's breast,
Through which a fountain flows,
Perennial, fathomless, and blest,
By winter never froze."

How often I have wondered, Does God love deeper, longer, than a mother? The "sinful son" in this "outer darkness" Jesus speaks of,—is he utterly cast forth from the hand of God? is he utterly, utterly quenched in night? Ah me! While I speak, it is borne in upon my soul with strange significance: He prayed from His cross, "Father, forgive them;" *that* LAST *prayer, was it ever answered?*

NOTE.

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

1. To be true, theological dogmas must agree with the common laws of the universe; or rather, must be those laws lifted into the region of morals. The more the material, mental, and moral kingdoms come under investigation, the more apparent does it become that the laws which govern them are identical. If Christianity is divine, its principles will be in harmony with the principles upon which God has established all things, whether physical, animal, or human. It cannot contain doctrines which involve arbitrary or opposite principles: not if God be One. If, then, eternal punishment be a doctrine of Christianity, the principle on which it is founded is in the original constitution of things. A Hell cannot be accepted as a mere figment of Christianity.

2. Assuming the general impression of readers of the New Testament in relation to this doctrine to be correct; that we are there taught that there is a hell, that a human being of certain character *may* come and *must* come into a state of everlasting punishment; we are prepared to accept it as truth. The doctrine is as really required as the immense vertebræ of some unknown animal require that the undiscovered ribs should be immense and of a certain character. An astronomer observes in a planet a slower or quicker rate of motion at one point of its orbit: he argues that there must be a world beyond it, not yet seen; and Neptune is presently discovered. A Hell is the full harvest of self-indulgence, evil, sin.

3. We remark two things:—1. *Character creates condition.* Life, progress, and every good are dependent on

law and opportunity. Law and opportunity unobserved or despised; aggravation, disease, at last death are the consequence. It is the curse of broken law. Lifted into the region of morals we call it the punishment of sin. "Sin is the transgression of law—the being out of law; and the wages of sin is death." It cannot be otherwise, if the principles on which God administers His moral government be identical with those of the material universe—punishment is a necessity God has laid upon Himself from the nature and character of sin. When a human soul is living in sin, the future of that soul is either regeneration and ultimate Heaven, or aggravation, death, and Hell. By virtue of the fundamental property of nerve-centres, which re-act in a definite way to suitable impressions, organically register their experience and acquire their special faculties by education, many of the daily actions of our life take place in answer to sensations that are not perceived—become, so to speak, instinctive, automatic. Similarly in morals. Sin, as it were, relaxes the nervous power of a man: indulged, the punishment gains in force, even to torpor; and to sin becomes almost instinctive, automatic. There is a limit set, through all nature, to remedial power and opportunity. Given a plant which through some defect or freak derogates from its true and good fruit: if it yield not to the remedial hand of man within a certain period, it will become a mere weed and its fruit weeds; it will never recover itself, it can never be saved. So, given a man whom sin has punished now and in this life unto nervous torpor, moral death: if in the next life the laws of our constitution remain the same, and they must, then the self-perpetuating punishment of sin will go on; it cannot work or suffer itself into goodness, truth, beauty, might—anything we call Life or God; it can know no limit in self-degenerating power

except the capacity of the creature. There *can*, then, be a Hell.

4. Let it be remarked next:—*True being depends on external power.* The law which binds the earth in its orbital path finds expression in the being of a flower; the being of a flower and the life of a human soul are governed by one and the same law. Given, then, a flower with every capacity for strength, beauty, and sweetness; put it beyond the range of the mighty sun's hand of blessing, put it in the "outer darkness" of a cellar, whence the celestial sheen is excluded, into which no showers can come, and through which no breeze can sweep: the flower will live for a time, even will propagate life; but what life! Its stalk and branches will become poor, weak, spongy, nerveless things; its leaves will grow more yellow and diminutive, its flower less and less like the God-purposed thing it might have been, and its smell will degenerate into a tainting impurity; why? Because by a mysterious chemical communion with the Sun, alone could the glory and goodness that were in it be brought to blossom and fruitage. Light, not the mere *need* of light, quickens strong life and paints the beautiful. The presence of the true, not its *felt absence*, corrects the false. Communion with the grand, good, strong, and loving, *alone* can recover and transform. If, therefore, the language of Christ and His Apostles will *not* admit of the interpretation that Hell is the theatre of a more effective moral discipline than earth, that future punishment is really disciplinary;—and will the general mind admit the words "outer darkness—unquenchable fire—everlasting punishment—place of torment—and depart, ye cursed," capable of the interpretation?—then the doctrine of an irremediable state of punishment in the life to come is in harmony with the law which we recognise in the utter

falling off from fruitage, beauty, and trueness of uncultivated plants, and in the fearful degradation and mere animalism into which isolated and neglected tribes of our race have fallen. "Destruction—death—perish—devour, for ever and ever:"—do these Scripture terms become more intelligible in the light of this law?

5. Not without significance is the word used by Christ for "punishment"—κόλασιν, Matt. xxv. 46: the verb is used also in Acts iv. 21, and 2 Peter ii. 9. If the idea radically is, not pain, suffering, or torment inflicted on a criminal or defaulter by a second party, as vengeance or reprisal, but rather self-infliction, self-torment as a necessary issue to certain spirit, character, or actions, then we submit that this should have its weight in our interpretation and setting forth of the doctrine. Hell is less of God and more of man than is commonly understood. And it is in spite of God; for even Omnipotence cannot coerce moral nature. The faintness that indicates something is wrong may deteriorate into torpor that feels nothing; the dull, distressful pain into burning agony; strangled penitence into "eternal damnation." The terrible things uttered by our Lord were the finishing touches of a Divine compassion that would save if it could; would save before the law of opportunity should be fulfilled: "I would; how often!—but ye would not." That which demands our weightier consideration is, not the duration of future punishment, but the time divinely-purposed for development—not the fact of a Hell, but who must ultimately come to it.

6. In the above remarks we merely suggest, in relation to this doctrine, so much as seems to us definite and clear. It becomes us to speak little, and that little reverently, on a subject so awful and of which so little is revealed; the more especially that it stands intimately bound up with

the insoluble problem of the existence of evil;—that mighty, grim rock, against which "the waves of philosophy have dashed themselves unceasingly since the birth-day of human thought, and have retired broken and powerless, without displacing the minutest fragment, without softening one feature of its dark and rugged surface."

VIII.

JESUS THE MEDIATOR.

"And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only."—MATT. xvii. 8.

1. MOSES and Elias are not: mysteriously manifested, as mysteriously withdrawn, and no more seen. The Voice, too,—the Voice of the Invisible "I am,"—it is past; the morning arises over the mount with its wonted silence. And the glory has vanished from the person of Jesus. The heavenly sunlight has faded from His countenance; His raiment has lost its glistening whiteness; "Jesus is found alone." Peter, James, and John heard the voice no more, and saw nothing and no one, "save Jesus only," and Him "in fashion as a man." Was there no divine meaning in this dissolving of the superhuman and mysterious back again into the visible and human? This, I venture to suggest, is the interpretation of the thing:—"*There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*" (1 Tim. ii. 5).

2. Assuming its correctness, we will proceed to

consider the subjects which this interpretation brings before us. First, this :—

GOD IS ONE ; A PERSON.

In Moses it is written, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." "Thus saith the Lord, I am the first and I am the last, and beside me there is no God," is the testimony of the prophets. Jesus bore witness that "There is none good but One, that is God." And the apostles of Christianity taught "God is One." *It is a doctrine which harmonises with human reason:* for unity and personality are one. That which distinguishes one man from another, and holds him to his identity, is a personal self-consciousness and a continuous will. Suppose these characteristics of his being to change or to be marred, say by a fever or some mischance, we could not call him to account for his sayings or doings. His *being* has fallen into fragments. His *oneness* is broken, and all other continuity goes for nothing. Lift this up from the man to God, and it compels us to say that if God be not *One person*, He is not One at all. Nothing *impersonal* can be God; and a plurality of infinite minds is a plurality of Gods. *Yet the doctrine of a Divine Trinity is a truth.* For it is certain that when we entertain the thought of God we conceive as

co-existing in Him three eternal and really different actions:—the action of *Activity or Power;* of *Idea or Understanding;* and of *Will or desire of all possible Good.* Now let it be understood that while the material universe bears an ever-accumulating witness to the existence of the first action, the second finds expression in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, whose uniqueness is unquestionable and supernatural; and the third action is evidenced by the world's history, in the moral advance of humanity,—a moral advance strikingly visible by contrast of the foremost nations of the world at this present time with the foremost nations of the ages prior to the Christian era. Let it also be borne in mind that the Latin word *persona*, from which we have the theological term "person" in relation to the Trinity, meant radically not a separate and distinct being, but a "mask." Its primary and popular application was to the actor, who, in ancient times, while reciting the sentiments of others, assumed as far as practicable their appearance. The audience never imagined the actor to have lost his own identity: he was merely the character, the revelation of an invisible somebody. We then come to know, through the aid of reason, illuminated by history and Scripture, that while there is one only God, we behold the *Power of God* masked as the Father in creation, the *Ideal of*

God masked as the Son in Jesus of Nazareth, and the *Will of God* masked as the Holy Spirit, "the power that worketh in us." These three are neither on the one hand three faculties, nor on the other three distinctive beings; but are a true Trinity of energies comprehending the *One*, who is "God over all, blessed for ever."

3. We now advance to a second consideration, which we will put as a question :—

WHAT IS THE BEARING OF THIS ONE GOD TOWARDS MEN?

Both in nature and Scripture we meet with contradictory testimony. 1. In *Nature.* If there are the smile and sunshine of the heavens, and the beauty and plenty of the world's wide seas and fields which seem to speak of Wisdom and Goodness, what voice have the sweeping floods, angry tempests, and barren deserts? If we recognise the benevolence of a Father in the mutual loves and labours of the home; every home also has its cares, sicknesses, heart-burnings, and coffins, in which it is very difficult for the human heart to perceive the milder virtues of gentleness and loving-kindness. If we discover some who enjoy the peace of personal trueness and the blessedness of conscious integrity, there are also the stern

facts that children inherit the sins of their fathers in their very bones, and good men suffer anguish because their ancestors were profligates. 2. Nor is the contradictory testimony lessened if we turn to *Scripture.* It is written, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die: He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, he shall be destroyed without remedy: Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them: The face of the Lord is against them that do evil: The end of the wicked is to be cut off: God is a jealous God." These seem sufficiently emphatic, and absolutely inflexible, shadowing forth indignation and wrath. Yet also it is written, "The Lord is slow to anger and of great mercy, and repenteth Him of the evil: He is long-suffering, not willing that any should perish: I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore turn yourselves and live: Let the wicked man return to God; He will abundantly pardon: Let Israel hope in the Lord; for with the Lord is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption."

4. What shall we say then? Are there two principles or Gods—one a destroyer, the other a deliverer? This has been the conclusion of many an ancient philosophy and modern heathenism. Or shall we say,

there are two opposite principles in the one God? There would seem to be much reason to fear that this is the indefinite, misty notion of many in Christendom. The unity of the universe, so conclusively demonstrable from any of its kingdoms, material, vegetable, animal, or moral, protests against the former: and the Scriptures utterly repudiate any dualism in the essence of God. The truth, as I understand it, is this:—There is a Being, the King eternal, who alone has immortality, whom no man hath seen or can see; His greatness is unsearchable; He covereth Himself with light; He stretched out the heavens, maketh the clouds His chariot, and walketh upon the wings of the wind; secret things belong to Him; His righteousness is like the great mountains; His judgments are a great deep; with strength He girdeth Himself; His footsteps are not known; we cannot find Him out; who hath been His counsellor? who can stand before His cold? Yet He is love; His mercy endureth for ever; He is a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside Him:—*this is the true God.* At sundry times and in divers manners He spake in times past unto the fathers; He has spoken unto the world that now is by a Son; in this Son He has fully revealed Himself; He harmonises in Him the seeming contradictions of His character and

bearing towards us; He is not a mere placating victim to the principle of justice, but rather the burning indignation of never-dying love condensed into a consuming fire: in the Son His righteousness and mercy are welded together, and tempered into "the sword of the Spirit:"—*this is the philosophy of Christianity.*

5. Law and prophecy, miracles and revelations, oracle and tabernacle,—all have passed away. "Jesus only" is left to the world. Now and for evermore

THE MAN CHRIST JESUS IS THE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MEN.

The doctrine of mediation is no discord in nature's voices, no grating note in the anthem of God's universe. It is one of the verities on which our world and all the worlds are established. Would a planet deviate from its mean orbital path? A counter attraction becomes the mediator that preserves it under the influence of its primary. Is a bone fractured? The sound parts of the system assume a mediatorial function, and pour out a peculiar fluid in the vicinity, which coagulates, and, becoming gradually consistent, is finally converted into bone. Is a man sick? What is she but a mediator, who comes

with unceasing patience and loving attention between him and the disease with which he is struggling? The prodigal son: what is the father but a mediator, who comes between him and ruin with affectionate calls to repentance, and stern, sad words of prophetic doom? The doctrine of mediation thus discovered to be an established law in the regions of physics and social life, renders it *à priori* probable that we should meet with it in the region of morals. Granted that man has deviated from his true sphere of being, what we find elsewhere would enable us to predict that the one "God over all" would provide a similar mediatorial means, adapted to his moral nature. That means has been provided in "the man Christ Jesus."

6. "The man." Is there no meaning in St Paul's use of that word "man" so emphatically? The glory departed, Moses and Elias went away, and Jesus came down from the mount, "the Son of man." *Why was the Mediator a man?* Say the Unitarians, We are to understand He was a *man*,—no more. Say the orthodox Trinitarians, The Apostle in emphasising the word "man" referred to that special Person of whom "holy men of old" wrote in the Psalms and Prophets.* Both parties appear to miss the true meaning, which is the *personality of God.* In con-

* The definite article "*the*" is not in the best MSS.

stituting a man the Mediator God would have us understand that He, "with whom we have to do," is not an intangible, all-diffusive Spirit, "the soul of all things, immanent in dewdrops that glitter and stars that sail through silver seas;" or pure essence, without form or passions; or impassible law; but that He is a true Being, a veritable Person, although infinitely beyond human comprehension and definition. We cannot grasp the magnificence of the Creator; we cannot take immensity by the hand; our heart cannot feed on the sublimities of the God of Hosts. But in setting forth a Man-mediator we have pressed upon us the personality of God to man, to every man. Jesus is a point around which our shadowy instincts and desires may condense. To the *Man* who lived among us and spoke human speech, who was grieved by our sins and gladdened by our penitence, who loved us with a human heart and helped us with human hands, who conducted Himself to each individual as if he were the only individual God cared for and loved,—to Him *as God* every knee can bow, every tongue confess. When the Man-mediator says, "No man can come unto the Father but by Me," we quite understand Him; for our yearning human heart recognises in His self-giving, which hungered, sorrowed, stooped, suffered,

and died in a ministry to the sinful and lost, the emotions of the mighty heart of God, and is thankful and satisfied: we have found the Lord.

7. "The man Christ,"—the anointed One, the sent One, the second Adam, the Only-begotten of the Father. This is the idea,—*the character of the ever Unseen is mirrored in the man Christ.* Although I cannot conceive the body of Jesus other than marvellously perfect, and in all the grand and beautiful productions of the pencil of genius have never seen a face that has responded to the ideal graven on my soul as His; yet it was not so much in the beauty of His person as in His moral being that God gave expression to His anointing and election. In *soul* Jesus was constituted the mediating Christ. "The image of the invisible God" could only be mirrored in a profoundly pure and luminous soul. In one Man only has the world intuitively recognised "the brightness of glory—" in His flawless, stainless, unmarred, invincible soul: that one Man is Jesus of Nazareth; He is therefore the Christ. His mediatorial work is threefold:—

(1.) *In Him the holiness of God brings evil to light;* as sunshine the threadbareness of a garment. The hatefulness, ugliness, and blackness of sin are discovered by the light of the moral pureness of Christ.

To realise how deformed, unloveable, poor and petty in soul we are, we have only to place the best painting of ourself by the side of the outlined engraving of the Christ in the Gospels. *He* "shall convince the world of *sin*."

(2.) In Christ the holiness of God *expresses its indignation against the evil-doer.* We are made to feel this indignation in all His intercourse with the Pharisees. It manifests itself in many a parable. It is spoken in more than one flash of the eye, and passionate remonstrance of the voice. Not avenging wrath, not destructive anger, not impassible rightness; no! but, if the illustration may be allowed, the passionate repulse of soul felt by a noble, pure-hearted but wronged woman:—this is "the Spirit of Truth which proceedeth from the Father," and it convinces the world of "judgment to come."

(3.) In Christ the holiness of God *writes its utter self-sacrificing nature in order to save.* His is not a self-seeking righteousness, but a self-giving. It is not a destroying, but a sin-consuming and self-consuming fire. God never had but one Christ, and He gave Him to the cross that He might save the evil-doer: this is the righteousness of God. The noblest creation of God is a soul; He never had but one rich in all the wealth of purity, love, might; that One "taketh

away the sin of the world;" in Him we behold the self-devotion for our sake of "the Holy One who inhabiteth eternity."

8. But a "Mediator between God and men" needs not only to stand between God and men, bringing God down to men, but also between men and God, lifting men up to God. This is why Jesus calls Himself "the Son of Man," and St Paul calls the Mediator "the man Christ *Jesus*." If in His moral being He was "God," in His human being He was "man;" a man whom Peter, James, John, and they all knew; whom we know; of our bone and flesh, nursed on a mother's knee. Acting for the Father, He was the Revealer, "the Son of God." Acting for the world, He was the Substitute, "the Son of Man." *God in Christ* submitted to real, literal self-sacrifice, coming down to men that He might lay hold of their nature, redeem it, purify it, save it. *Man in Jesus* appropriated this truth by faith, and gave Himself up to God, "a living Sacrifice, devoted," nailing sin to the cross. By an appropriating faith of the heart, we—you and I—lay hold of the love of the Father which is revealed in Christ; the knowledge is our awaking from death in "trespasses and sins;" it constrains us at once to a Calvary; we insert ourselves into the spirit and lot of the crucified Jesus; His agony and bloody

sweat, His cross and passion, His death and burial, all become ours, our very own; "our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin;" and "being justified by His blood, we are saved from wrath through Him,—we have peace with God,—and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Now we understand, because we feel; we feel because "God hath loved us and sent His Son the propitiation for our sins;" He is "the days-man betwixt us, that can lay His hand upon us both." We have need no more of angel, priest, weird prophet, or ecstatic psalmist; there is "one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;" "Jesus only."

9. But

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH HIM WHO IS CALLED CHRIST?

Do you ask, *who, what, was Jesus Christ?* We answer, in *moral* being He was God; in human being He was man. In the former He could say, "I and my Father are One;" in the latter He could say, "My Father is greater than I." He was "the image of the invisible God; God manifested in the flesh:" yet "learned He obedience by the things which He suffered, and offered up prayers and suppli-

cations with strong crying and tears." *In His moral bearing towards men* He was the heart of God laid bare, that the world might hear the beat of its throbbings, and feel the burden of its deep pulsations. *In His human bearing towards God* He was the archetypal man, rendering the loving, trustful, true worship of the child to the Father, alike in sunshine and deepening night. Nor are we at liberty to treat this dualism of Christ as a figment of theology. For 1. Granted that He is a historical character, it is only that the same God, who is united to us all, and to whom we are united by the intersphering of spirit-life, united Himself to a "second Adam," a man as man existed in the Divine idea before the creation of the world, a man untainted by the sins of the ages. And 2. Granted that Christ's destined end in the world was to be a Mediator, then the dualism which appeared in Him was of necessity to such an office. The Mediator must enter into the lot of the wronged and the wrong-doer; He must be to each the other; to be the Reconciler He must be the Sacrifice of both parties. The mediating mother, who is one with the noble, wise, upright, affectionate father, and one with the ignorant, foolish, wayward, wilful, wrong-doing child, is a far-off but true picture of the Mediator Christ Jesus.

10. Lastly, do you ask yet another question, *What should be our bearing towards Jesus Christ?* I answer without reserve, FAITH AND WORSHIP. Can I give less? In the Book that tells of Him there is no caution against over-trusting and over-exalting Him. He is the incarnation of all that is most attractive, lovely, good, holy, great—of all that men are wont to call divine. Apart from Him I know no God at all. I cannot trust an invisible mystery: nor put faith in incomprehensible omnipotence: nor bind the affections of my heart to immensity. I am a waif on the ocean of life, without Jesus Christ. But for Him, I have no hope, no sunshine, no grace, no moral power. How can I withhold my faith, when He comes and tells me, wicked, weak man as I am, that like as a mother is found where her child cries and a father where his boy stumbles and falls, so God is found where men sin and suffer, are wounded and cursed? How can I do less than love, adore, and worship, when He *is* that father and mother, that *God*, to ME?—Oh no! I have looked into His face and listened to His voice, I have watched the throbbings of His heart, and drunk of His spirit, and He has captivated my soul's deepest reverence and love; what is that but *worship?* He is "my Lord and my God."

NOTE.

THEOLOGICAL MEANING OF THE WORD "PERSON."

1. We are constantly meeting with such phrases as, "Three persons in one God;" "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons;" "These three persons are really one God;" "God in three persons." What is meant?

2. The classic language of the first Christian centuries was Greek; and Plato, the Greek, then exercised the greatest influence in the region of philosophy. Himself indeed had lived long anterior to the Christian era, but his philosophy was regnant among the thinkers of the heathen world in the age to which we refer. It is of Plato's Trinity we would speak first. Observing that a man must have a motive or disposition of mind to set his understanding to work, and a volition or power to make it take effect, before he can execute what he knows, Plato would seem to have argued from man up to man's Creator, and ascribed three principles to His divine nature. The first he called Το Αγαθον, or Goodness; the second, Νους, or Intelligence; the third, Ψυχη, or Activity. Further, conceiving man's knowledge of objects to be a voluntary act of the mind, not a passive perception, he supposed there must be motive to give it birth. He, therefore, taught that *Nous* was generated by *To Agathon*, and that from these two proceeded that *Psyche* by which all things were created. This was the Trinity,—our term, not Plato's.

3. But by what name should these three principles in the Deity be distinguished? *Qualities* would not do;

for though qualities may *co*-exist in one subject, they cannot *in*-exist in one another. Nor could *substances* be the term; for then they must have been component parts of *To On*, or the divine *That*,—God; and three substances united form a fourth substance. Plato, therefore, called the three principles *Hypostases*,—which, perhaps, may allowably be rendered *Subsistences*, as something between qualities and substances. Three co-eternal, co-equal, co-infinite *Hypostases* in the *To On*, the one undivided God: this was the idea current among the philosophers in the heathen Roman world of the first century.

4. Now undoubtedly the disciples found a Trinity in the Christian Scriptures; and it was "in the name (not names) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" that they were baptized. When, therefore, the Christian Trinity came to be expounded, Plato's word *Hypostasis*, being already to hand, and having a certain popular meaning, was adopted. In the adoption of this word, warrant may have been obtained from the apostolic writer to the "Hebrews," who uses it in reference to Jesus Christ, whom he describes as "the express image of God's *person* (*hypostaseos*)," evidently referring, not to God's form or being, but to His goodness or activity.

5. But can we arrive at the popular meaning attached by the early Christians to the three *Hypostases* in the Trinity? If we can, it may help us to understand the doctrine, as taught by those nearest to the apostolic times. Already in the discourse the meaning has been stated. We arrive at it in this way:—It is a fair conclusion that when the Greek language gave place to the Latin, the Latin Fathers would understand the sense of their Greek contemporaries and their immediate ancestors. In selecting a word to represent *Hypostasis*, they may, therefore, be credited with selecting one which would

correctly express the idea of the original Christian Church. They selected the word *Persona*. It was a word of the common people. It was technical to no peculiar philosophy; but wherever a Roman theatre was known, there this word obtained currency. From *this* "*Persona*" has come our *theological* term "Person."

6. Originally signifying the vizard used by actors or orators on the stage, which was shaped and coloured to represent the features and complexion of him whose words they were uttering, it naturally came to be applied to the actor or orator himself. *Persona*, therefore, is the same as *Character, Revelation;* and not a distinct, separate, complete being, as in the popular use of the word "person." *Persona* was the Character or Revelation of an invisible somebody. The actor had not lost his own identity, though he wore to the audience the Character or Revelation of Œdipus or Priam, who could not be introduced upon the stage in own proper form or being.

7. When, therefore, we meet with *Hypostasis* or *Persona* in the works of the Fathers; or the word *Person* in the Nicene Creed, drawn up by the first General Council held at Nice, A.D. 325; or in the Creed called after St Athanasius, and which became famous about 150 years later; or in any other of the creeds of Christendom; it becomes us to recur in mind to the meanings attached to these words, on the occasion of their original introduction into Christian Theology. By so doing, we shall avoid much painful discussion; and come nearer to an understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. Applied to the Father or the Son or the Holy Ghost, "*Person*" means, not separate existence, or a self-conscious, complete Unity, but rather *a Character, Revelation, Exhibition, Outward Manifestation of the One ever and for ever invisible God.* "So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy

Spirit is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but one God." "There is but one living and true God. And in the Unity of this Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity."

8. Short as illustrations must ever come in explanation of the Trinity, a truth *per se* so sublime and above man, if we might venture on one, we would adopt that which the Scriptures suggest,—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The Father is Thought unexpressed;

The Son is the Thought embodied in a Word;

The Spirit is the Word working in human minds.

Or this,—"Our God is a consuming fire."

The Father is the imperceptible and subtle Heat which animates the universe and is the source of all life;

The Son is the Heat condensed into the direct and tangible form of Fire;

The Spirit is the same essence issuing forth in Light,—a Light commensurate and inseparable from the flame it accompanies.

In a word, the true Being of the Great One, the Good One, the God, is a *Unity of Manifoldness.*

IX.

CHRIST AND CHRISTIANITY.

"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."—
HEB. xiii. 8.

1. THESE words form a fitting close to the train of thought pursued in this short series of discourses suggested by the Transfiguration on the Mount. *Jesus Christ is the central point in the history of human morals.* Coming in the middle of the centuries, He planted His foot on the unquiet sin-beaten sea, and rolled back the devouring thing into its divinely-appointed channels. Presently ascending into the unseen, He paralysed the world in its untoward revolutions, and drew it after Him into its true orbital path. All the dreamings, philosophies, revelations, and idolatries of the ages had their "end" in Him. The grand catalogue of lawgivers, priests, prophets, and psalmists He punctuated with a cross. He sealed up the past, so that it never can be rewritten. On the new page of human consciousness, He inscribed in letters of consuming light His own

name, "Jesus Christ." The world never can return to what it was before His day. *He has re-made society.* Coming to the individual, He has purified the fountains of being, pacified the guilty conscience, filled the soul with sunshine and energy, and photographed upon the dark grave bright, glowing pictures of an ever-expanding, never-sorrowing futurity. He has evoked and refined the best sympathies of our nature, giving man a kindly and practical interest in his fellow-man; so that the world is planted with schools, hospitals, asylums, homes, and a thousand philanthropic ideas, all unknown in the centuries anterior to His era. He has entered states, and flashed and frowned upon tyranny and misrule until the wildest governments have become moulded to principles of rectitude, serfs been converted into subjects, and nobles into guardians. "The cross is at the centre of the world, and the world is beginning to yield to its sway. The empty tomb is hard by the cross, and with the risen Saviour all things rise." That which is, is prophetic of that which shall be. "God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name; that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

2. There are those who deny that Jesus Christ is

divine. Perhaps no argument obtained from prophecy, miracles, or scriptural texts has the convincing power that is resident in the fact of the moral revolution Jesus Christ has accomplished in the world. It is open to no discussion; and it is unique, single both in kind and excellence. A result so extraordinary and divine must have a commensurate cause. We therefore argue that Christendom proves Christianity is of divine origin, and that the pure, righteous, divine impulses and endeavours of the Christian prove Christ was the moral image of God. "I give you to understand that no man can say 'Jesus is the Lord' but by the Holy Ghost." He is divine to those who are divine. The human Christ attracts men, brings them to a second birth, a birth into a life of "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Then they recognise Him to be divine. What no arguments could have proved to them, their consciousness simply and finally assumes. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." "The evidence of the sun is its light, and not the shadow on the dial." Is not this the explanation of the widely different estimate of Jesus Christ which the disciples of the Gospels discover, and the disciple of the Acts and Epistles? Was not their experience a development in the direction of the divine Christ?

Have not the experiences of all disciples been similar? Even among those who have declined to subscribe to a tabulated expression of His divinity, have not the choicest, divinest souls rendered Jesus Christ their deepest love and most sacred reverence? and what is that but adoration? and what is such adoration but divine worship? They can give to God no more. The heart says "This is the true God and the eternal life."

3. Whether taken in connection with the words preceding or following it, our text is equally significant. If taken with the words before it, we should understand it thus:—"Remember those who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ, *who is* the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." *They* are gone away, their tongue is silent; you receive instruction from them no more; but Jesus Christ was the "end" of their doctrines, their ministrations, and their works; consider *Him*: He lives, He remains with you always.—If taken with the words after it, we should render the apostle's meaning thus:—"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever: *therefore* be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines." Since the first and chief apostles were called away, others have

arisen who teach new and strange doctrines: but what Jesus Christ was to Peter, James, and John, He still is; be not troubled, but establish your heart in this truth. In the two interpretations there are, among other points, three on which we will dwell.

4. First,—

THE ETERNAL SAMENESS OF GOD.

I use the word "sameness" in the sense of absence of difference. It is perhaps open to objection, but I use it in preference to "unchangeable" or "immutable;" for these two words in the popular mind have drifted from their original theological meaning, having come to be identical with "impassible," or nearly so; thus tending to invest God with ideas *thingish* rather than *personal.* If I understand God at all, He has genuine character. "He has feeling, and feels appropriately toward everything done; He feels badness as badness, and goodness as goodness, —is pained by the one, pleased by the other. There must be so much, or such kind of passibility in Him, that He will feel toward everything as it is, and will be diversely affected by diverse things, according to their quality." This is a cardinal truth, and any word that may tend to darken or lower it I would jealously avoid using. God is unchangeable in

essence, immutable in purpose, and eternally the same in character or moral being.

5. The person of Jesus Christ had a beginning and was subject to change. He had to come to knowledge as other men; for it is expressly testified of His early years, "He increased in wisdom," purpose, will, aim,—was a development. But there was that *Something* "the Holy Ghost,"—that *Someone* "the Father,"—which bound up the person of Jesus Christ into a moral unity with God; a unity of which He was perfectly conscious. "My Father is greater than I," He once said: could a mere man be found guilty of the assumption conveyed in that sentence? And on another occasion He asked, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" It is idle to introduce psychological speculations into the discussion of One who "though in the form of man, yet thought it no encroachment to be equal with God." The claim cannot be separated from the character. The character is superhuman, not only in fact but in conception. We have therefore no alternative but to conclude that He is "*the* Son of God;" that He and God are in some mysterious way One; in a way nearer, deeper, and truer than is possible to a mere man. But further: in a manner and in words, which philosopher or fanatic never conceived, Jesus Christ

assumes a consciousness of pre-existence. It could not be predicated of His body, nor of a mere human soul as yours or mine; but only of that *Something, Someone.* "What if you shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before? Verily, verily I say unto you, Before Abraham was I am. I came forth from the Father and am come into the world; again I leave the world and go to my Father. Father, glorify Thou me with Thine own Self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." We connect these words with the beauty and grandeur of His character, and with the homage, love, and adoration which have ever characterised those who have been inspired by Him; and feel ourselves shut up to the conviction that, in some way which neither science nor theology may perhaps ever be able to tabulate, God and Jesus Christ are One,—bound together in a Spiritual Unity. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."

6. Science cannot demonstrate the impossibility of such an incarnation. Indeed, by the subtle but omnipotent sway of man's spirit over his body and the indissoluble union of one with the other, science affords an *à priori* probability of such an incarnation, if a revelation of the moral being of God be a universally recognised necessity. That the necessity exists is

evidenced by the history of every religion; and the races of prophets and priests among every people bear equal witness to the conviction, that to be made intelligible to men the moral being of God can be revealed in no other way than by a *person.* Men cannot worship righteousness, beauty, justice, law. They are abstractions. So also are goodness, mercy, love. Abstractions cannot be our friend. We want a *Being;* a Someone who is all this; and all this to *each me,* and *for* each me. Nor will it suffice to be told there is such an Infinite Being. Too much light darkens as well as too little. To bring the blazing sun down close to our eyes would give us no conception of its glory. If God is to help, purify, bless, and save, there must be a proportion somewhere between Him and men. There must be a Mediator between the mighty, invisible, saving God and the creature to be saved, if the creature is an intelligent, free-will agent. Therefore God "hath spoken to us by a Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things."

7. That Son is Jesus Christ; who is not a mere Archetypal Man, but is a Revealer, "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God," if we have correctly grasped the mystery of His being. He has brought God down from heaven to earth that He may raise men from earth to heaven. Men "looking unto

Jesus," are to see God, hear God, feel God, lay hold of God with the mind and heart; alike when He is teaching on the mountain-side or in the temple at Jerusalem, when hushing the storm so wildly rocking "the little ship" or wiping away the widow's tears by the touch of life and word of resurrection; alike as He informs the dark mind of the Samaritan woman and gives blind beggars the power to see, or in His utterances of indignant holiness and pleading truth; alike while bearing all things for truth's sake and distributing all things for love's sake, while giving His whole being for others and yielding to the cross to save some. In His life and death, Jesus of Nazareth is the Image of what, in moral being and government, the invisible God has ever been, ever will be,—*now is*. God is towards man eternally the same in righteousness and mercy, in restrained almightiness and forgetting omniscience, in indignation and wrath, that Jesus was to Peter, John, and Paul. By faith, every Peter may behold the Lord's look, every John pillow his head on God's breast, and every Paul appropriate the promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee." As Aquinas reads, John i. 4, "That which was made in Him was Life and the life was the light of men." Oh, to fling open the window at once, and let Him shine in!

8. We now advance to the consideration of a second point—

THE ETERNAL ABIDING OF GOD AMONG MEN.

As already stated, Jesus Christ in His own proper person was "Emmanuel—*God-with-us;*" but He left the earth and is seen no more. Are we not too apt to think of Him as one who lived and died eighteen hundred years ago? But when He went away He did not leave us anything less than *Himself;* that *Something, Someone,* which was in Him "the Life." "It is expedient for you that I go away" were His strange words. If we may attempt to give expression to His meaning, we should put it thus:—"I have told you that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me, but you do not understand: neither you nor the world as yet can see God in me; the body is the hindrance. I will go away to Him that sent me; then you will think of me, will feel after me, your mind and heart will not lose hold of me; and I will send into you from the Father who is in me the Spirit of Truth, and you will begin to understand me: the Enlightener, the Strengthener, the Interpreter, the Comforter shall come to you. I, who now am to you the Son, and the Father manifested in the Son, will then become to you the Holy Spirit, interpreting

the Father and the Son; and will quicken you to faith in me, and to salvation through me. I therefore tell you the truth, It is expedient for you that I go away." And He went away. Up from the earth He rose, and has hovered over it ever since,—not a thing of flesh and blood but a Spirit, not a form but an Ideal, not a man but *GOD*. And His Spirit, which by His departure He has sent forth into the world, has made us comprehend Him better, as He said, "He shall glorify me, and receive of mine and show unto you." Christianity, therefore, as a fact without us, is a revelation by the letter and the spirit of a Living Person: and Christianity, as the possession of a cleansing and hallowing power within us, is a supreme love to this Divine Person, which realises the invisible and absent. Man, then, has to do, not with a principle but a Person, not with truth only but with Him who is "*the* Truth," not with a book of revelation only but with the Revealer,—indeed, with nothing less than Jesus Christ, God-with-us. He is alive for evermore; and in Him for evermore God abides among men. Not only great but vital is the difference experienced by him who knows *about* Jesus Christ from the dead pages of a book, and him whose appropriating faith *realises* God in Jesus Christ,—a God who loves him, who understands him, from whose

sight he is never lost in the crowd of humanity, by whom he is never forgotten, to whom he can never become an object of indifference,—a God, who to him, in his difficulties, doubts, and distresses, is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." To *this* man Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation.

9. In the truth which we are endeavouring to enforce lies *the true solution of many perplexities that harass men.* If they would only turn from abstract problems to the Living Person, from God the Infinite to Jesus Christ God-with-us, from the Governor of the Worlds to "your Father and my Father,"—if they would only come into Christianity as the fishermen, lepers, publicans, outcasts, centurions, and women came in the far-back times, I am persuaded that men would never fail in knowing God, and what is His will concerning them,—they would never fail of salvation. Coming around about Jesus Christ, they would come within the sphere of that indescribable something which ever hangs about holy, true, deep, self-sacrificing love; and they would feel "If there be One to whom I could cling, to whom unbosom myself, whom I could trust, by whom be thoroughly understood, who would sympathise with me, who could deliver me,—it is Jesus Christ." And this they felt

would deepen into attachment to His person; attachment would strengthen into love: and it is *love* that brings forth out of the "man" the hidden God we long to find! "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent."

10. Thirdly. In the eternal sameness of God and His eternal abiding among men, we have an assurance of

THE PROGRESS OF "THE KINGDOM OF HIS DEAR SON."

Not of a Church. They who make *a* Church or *the* Church and the "kingdom of Christ and of God" interchangeable terms fall into a grave error. *The kingdom is the reign of God; the dominion of divine ideas.* It comprehends all those whose faith in Christ has quickened them to the love and obedience of childship to the Father in heaven. Its bounds are broader than any church. Its strength is to be determined by the Christlike influence which its subjects exercise. And the measure of its progress is the increased sway over the world of righteousness, truth, goodness, and love. The completion of the kingdom is "when all things shall be subdued unto Christ." *The Church is an "election of grace" for the accomplishment of this "purpose."* Says the apostle Peter, "*Ye* are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy

nation, a peculiar people"—but why this calling of God by Jesus Christ? Read on—"that ye should show forth the praises (rather *virtues*, as in his second epistle, where he says "add to your faith, virtue") of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light: . . . having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may, by your good works which they shall behold,"—what?—"glorify God;" that is, that the unbelievers, the vile and morally lost may through Christians be brought into the kingdom of Christ. The same thing is taught by St Paul: "He hath chosen us in Christ, that we should be holy and without blame before Him"—why?—"that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth." The divine purpose is the regeneration of humanity. To compass this object is the mystery of the incarnation; that men, responding to "the love of God which is in Christ Jesus," should tell out His love in holy, earnest, joyous tones to others, until others and others still should take up the song of Grace, and the whole earth become an altar whence the incense of Adoration should ascend to the heavens.

11. Now *what is the testimony of history in relation to this kingdom?* Need I say more than already has been said? The first heirs passed away, each in a martyr-chariot; but others, a mighty host, grasped the "sword of the Spirit" from their hands and the cross-banner from their dying clutch. Through them the kingdom advanced into remoter regions. It won its way into court, senate, forum, and temple. It took priests from their altars; ejected idols from their shrines; and grouped philosophers in its schools. The blood of each generation was as showers of rain upon prepared ground. The kingdom has grown until a world that was not known is now Christ's. It has created a moral and spiritual taste throughout Europe, America, and Australia unparalleled in the annals of humanity. "The true God" who was "in Christ" has brought alike the savage islander, the intellect of the philosopher, and the sceptre of the monarch under His rule. He has moulded into nobler and purer form all the relations and interests of mankind. Are not past and present triumphs prophetic of the future? Is there room for fear? No; for "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

12. "But——" Yes, I know what you would say:—*Even in Christendom the reign of God is not*

perfect, and old errors are plentiful. Despotism, vice, and superstition are not consumed. Charity, truth, and beauty do not dwell on the earth as in heaven. Great is the neglect of public worship. What strifes and ostentation, what intemperance and sensuality, mar the moral glory of the finest cities! Freethinkers, who have no religious creed of any kind, abound in the populous centres. And infidels, whose only article is "We do not believe," and Socinians and rationalists, with their abstract, heartless theologies,—these, too, have their place in Christendom. Worst of all, ecclesiastical institutions usurp Christ's seat of authority; sacraments are invested with saving power; effete doctrines are ever and again revived; and many are carried aside. All this is too true; and to our fathers, to the churches, to ourselves, attaches the burning shame! For alas! have we not trailed the honour of our Lord in the dust of worldliness? Have we not marred the reputation of the Gospel of Grace by lukewarmness and inactivity? Have we not hindered the Glory of God by endless strifes and divisions? Have we not shrouded the Sun of Righteousness with the mists of our theologies? In very truth, *the limitation of the "kingdom of God" is our unfaithfulness*; it cannot be attributed to lack of power in Christianity: *and the incompleteness of the*

"*reign of God*" *over us is our own fault, not Christ's;* for He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." What, then, ought Israel to do? what is laid upon us, in order to the advancement of the kingdom? how may we fulfil our divine calling as Christians?

13. First, "Men may rise by stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things." There is truth in the poet's words. By remembering his own sins a man may intensify his watchfulness. To the soul that has faith, failure gives additional inspiration. The tears of penitence watering the bare, dead past, quickens it with new life. Out of the graves of sin and regret rise the angels of knowledge and enthusiasm. The pure lily is begotten in the fœtid, stagnant pool. By the power of its healthy, God-given life, the rose-bush takes the tainting rottenness about its roots into itself, makes it material to its bud and leaf, and expresses out of it additional beauty for its blossoms, and sweetness for the air all round. *Let faith in the God-purposed kingdom get materials to stimulate its progress from imperfections and errors.* Faith will derive a sort of omnipotence from the history of the past. It will inspire the churches with a devotion and courage that shall hasten the accomplishment of the prayer Jesus Christ taught us, "Thy kingdom

come." Our confidence in the kingdom will be the world's baptism with fire. Let them who have the rule, and speak the Word of God, assure their hearts that "Jesus Christ" is the gladdest gospel for the world, and that there can be no better gospel for the sinful and lost than "Him crucified;" let them strengthen themselves in the conviction that, in Christ *the person*, the thoughts, perplexities, wants, and sicknesses of the human soul, will find a better solution than in a Christianity that has been theorised by philosophers;—not in vain shall be the cry, Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; drink of the sparkling stream as it dashes out of the mountain rock; that rock is Christ!

14. Secondly, *Let there be a more appropriating faith in Jesus Christ.* Men of fervid faith and saintly lives, of loving zeal and martyr-like devotion in the service of God and man, crowd upon the memory. We glory in their deeds, and revere their names. We praise "the unsearchable riches of Christ" by which they became so heroic and holy. Do we ever think of producing works that shall compare with theirs? Do we well and right not to nurse our wonder, admiration, and gratitude, until we too are begotten again unto earnest, active,

heroic life? Too much, too often is our thought, "As well expect to be a Rubens, a Correggio, a Raphael, an Angelo, as shine with the light and do the work of John, Peter, Paul, Lydia." We forget "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." True, we may never come to their brightness; they are stars: we may never accomplish results equal to theirs; they are mighty heroes: but we must not forget that it was Jesus Christ inspired their souls and moulded their lives,—that it is not so much *their* life, as the life of *Him* reproduced in them, that has commanded the reverence of a world. She sat alone, day after day, month after month, before the painting; gazing, thinking, questioning, yearning, praying. At length all Rome stood amazed one day to see a *face*, pure, lovely, divine; the creation of her pencil. She had caught the spirit which was in the painting, and it became to her life and power. Gazing upon Jesus Christ, thinking of Him, questioning Him, praying to Him, grasping Him with the heart, mighty men of old, and holy women also, became inspired, and "through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, out of weakness were made strong." Jesus Christ is ever the same; holding the same relations to

us that He held to them, giving to us the grace and power He gave to them, and requiring from us, in these times, the same fidelity, trueness, and heroism He required from them in the days that are past. If we have faith in a theory, we mould it into our very being: so let us lay hold of Jesus Christ with an appropriating faith until He shall be formed in us, "the hope of glory" (Col. i. 25–27). It is the light that shines; and it is the *shining light* brings the earth to life, goodness, beauty, music. Jesus said, "*I* am the Light of the world: I have chosen you out of the world: *ye* are the light of the world: let your light *so shine before men*, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Said Paul, "To me to live *is Christ*." No believer is a lost star in the "kingdom of heaven." No child, even the "babe in Christ," is unimportant in the "Father's house." Every kindled lamp illuminates some little sphere. Each branch in the vine, no matter how small, or how hidden under the eaves of the temple, has in it the gifts and calling of God.

15. Brethren, *there can be no doubt of the ultimate triumph of Jesus Christ.* "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."

He is Truth; and truth is one, pure, and indestructible. He is Light; and light is quickening, renewing and beautifying. He is Life; and life is progressive and immortal. Wealth, power, and learning have conspired for His destruction. At a thousand altars the oath of blood has been taken. But He lives! He has been subjected to every form of trial, and has come forth glorified with the glory of God. Friends have proved unfaithful and foes bitter; but "He went forth conquering and to conquer," and a crown has been given Him. Behind Him rests the bow of promise, on the retiring darkness; and before Him lie the streaming lights of opening and inconceivable glory. He shall yet be, in the fulness of times, "The blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords!" Who can doubt it? Every moral victory achieved is an increase of His kingdom. Every regeneration of a people is prophetic of the end. Sin's thunderstorms shall not always beat on the world. Error shall not always toss the soul of man about, like a vessel in a midnight storm. Jesus Christ yet shall reign over a redeemed humanity. The warfare is fast hastening to its consummation. His cross is triumphing gloriously. His enemies are confounded, and his rivals perishing. His heralds are in all lands, His name is heard in every language.

"To-day" He is the same "wisdom of God" to the British judge, that "yesterday" He was to Dionysius the Areopagite. He brings "to-day" the same "deliverance" to the negro on the hill-sides of Jamaica and the Hottentot in his miserable kraal, that "yesterday". He brought to Onesimus the slave of Philemon. "To-day" He is the same "Saviour" to the proud American and effeminate Hindoo, that "yesterday" He was to the dreaming Greek and haughty Roman. To many a tent-maker and fisherman, many a seller of purple and son of some grandmother Lois, many a physician and publican, in every land under heaven, He is "to-day" the same "unspeakable gift" that He was "yesterday" to Matthew and Luke, Timothy and Lydia, John and Paul. Who can doubt that His kingdom shall outgrow, outshine, and incorporate every other?

16. Can anything less than inspiration take possession of our hearts when we consider these things? We are pledged to the highest service under heaven, and with the strongest of all assurances. To the work, brethren! By the signs of the times in which we live, and the momentous questions, social, mental, and moral, which men are being called to solve; by that constant, irreversible law of destruction, which allows neither society, church, nor names to live,

except as they continue in harmony with the divine purpose; and by the name, commands, and promises of "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,"—I charge you and myself, that, in our plenty and power, we be the *rich* CHRIST; in our poverty the *poor* CHRIST; in our suffering the *suffering* CHRIST; in our unremunerative toil the *faithful* CHRIST; and in our home the *man* CHRIST, the *brother* CHRIST, the *children's* CHRIST; and in the world the *heir of* GOD *and joint-heir with* CHRIST.

"Thou, whose almighty Word
Chaos and darkness heard,
And took their flight,
Hear us, we humbly pray;
And where the Gospel's day
Sheds not its glorious ray,
Let there be Light."

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